



## On **Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Primer**

**If you have ever asked “Why is there so much violence in the Middle East?” or “What caused the current crisis?” or “Why is the current level of violence so intense?”—this book is for you.**

Using easy-to-understand and straight-forward language, Phyllis Bennis, a fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies and long time analyst of the Middle East and U.S. policy in the region, answers these and many other frequently asked questions regarding the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

## On **TARI**

TARI provides scholarly studies oriented towards understanding the present social, cultural, economic and political issues confronting Middle Eastern societies. TARI provides a venue for interactive meetings between Middle Eastern and international participants and provides focused research and public venues to analyze, discuss and present alternative perspectives. TARI organizes conferences, seminars and workshops to exchange ideas and present scholarly papers, as well as produce publications to share research and seminar results with the general public and specialists on the area.

TARI  
PO Box 691944  
Orlando, FL 32869-1944  
[www.tari.org](http://www.tari.org)

A Primer

# Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

Phyllis Bennis



A TARI Publication

© 2002 **Trans-Arab Research Institute, Inc.**

All maps courtesy of **PASSIA**. Front cover photo of Damascus Gate in Jerusalem  
courtesy of **Ali Hadjarian**.

Design by **Geoff Hartman** at **inSite graphics**.



## PART ONE

# The Crisis

### **Why is there so much violence in the Middle East? Isn't there violence on both sides?**

The violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories has come from both sides. Its human tragedies are equally devastating for all victims and all their families. Innocents, including children, have been killed on and by both sides, and both sides have violated international law. But the violence by Israelis and by Palestinians is not an equal opportunity killer; it does not have the same roots, nor are the two sides culpable in the same way.

Palestinians in the territories live under Israeli military occupation. They are not citizens of Israel or of any state, and have no rights of protest or redress. The occupation is a violent daily reality, in which Israeli soldiers, checkpoints, tanks, helicopter gunships, and F-16 fighter jets control every aspect of Palestinian lives, and have recently brought social, family and economic life to a virtual halt. In summer 2002 the U.S. Agency for International Development determined that Palestinian children living in the occupied territories faced malnutrition at one of the highest levels in the world—higher than in Somalia and Bangladesh. The occupation has been in place since 1967, although the current period has seen perhaps the most intense Israeli stranglehold on Palestinian life, and the highest levels of violence. What we often hear described simply as “the violence” in the Middle East cannot be understood without an understanding of what military occupation means.

Violence is central to maintaining Israel's military occupation. It is carried out primarily by Israeli military forces and Israeli settlers in the occupied territories who are themselves armed by the Israeli military, and its victims include some Palestinian militants and a large majority of Palestinian civilians, including many children. Because military occupation is itself illegal, all Israeli violence in the occupied territories stands in violation of international law—specifically the Geneva Conventions that identify the obligations of an occupying power to protect the occupied population.

Palestinian violence is the violence of resistance, and has escalated as conditions of life and loss of hope breed greater desperation. It is carried out primarily by individual Palestinians and those linked to small armed

factions, and is aimed mostly at military checkpoints, soldiers, and settlers in the occupied territories; recently more attacks, particularly suicide bombings, have been launched inside Israel, many of which have targeted civilian gathering places. Those attacks, targeting civilians, are themselves a violation of international law. But the overall right of an occupied population to resist a foreign military occupation, including through use of arms against military targets, is recognized as lawful under international law.

### **Why should Americans care about violence in the Middle East?**

When they learn about it, which is not always the case, Americans tend to care about violence and its effects on people's lives wherever it may be. In the case of Israel and Palestine, the violence is on the front pages of our newspapers and top story on radio and television on a daily basis. Many Americans are particularly concerned about violence there because of the religious significance of the area—including historical sites holy to Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Beyond the general concern about human suffering, many Americans have a special interest in events in the region because the U.S. government is by far the most dominant outside power there, and decisions made in Washington are central to developments towards war or peace. And further, the U.S. sends billions of our tax dollars in aid to the region, including about \$4 billion in annual aid to Israel alone.

U.S. policy in the Middle East also plays a major role in determining how people in that region view our government and American citizens. If we are concerned about the rise in international antagonism not only to Washington policies but towards American citizens, we need to take seriously what our government does in our name in far-flung parts of the world.

### **Why is the Middle East so important to the U.S. and internationally?**

From earliest history, the Middle East, and the area long known as Palestine, were global crossroads of trade, science, scholarship and religion in ancient civilizations. In more recent times, the discovery of oil in the region and the need of outside empires for reliable local allies led to the creation of western protectorates throughout the Middle East.

From 1967 through the beginnings of the 21st century, U.S. policy in the region has been based on protecting the triad of oil, Israel, and stability. During the Cold War the U.S. relied on Israel as a cat's paw—a military extension of its own strategic reach—both within the Middle East region and internationally in places as far as Angola and Guatemala. With the end of the Cold War, Israel remains a close and reliable ally, in the region and internationally as well, for the now unchallenged power of the U.S. And domestically, widespread support for Israel, most concentrated in the Jewish community and among the increasingly powerful right-wing Christian fundamentalists in the U.S., took root in popular culture and politics, giving Israel's supporters great influence over Washington policymakers.

future; it cannot even reach the discussion stage until Israel and Palestine, and thus Israelis and Palestinians, can sit across a negotiating table as equals, not while they face each other as occupied and occupier.

al economic cooperation. The "new Middle East" might look unfortunately similar to the "new North America," in which free trade agreements end up further enriching the U.S. behemoth, while the much smaller Canadian and especially the relatively tiny Mexican economies pay the price.

But such developments are not inevitable. The potential remains for democratization and efforts for regional advancement as the trajectory of the next century. But all of that must wait till an end to Israel's occupation.

### **Is a two-state arrangement really fair and based on justice?**

It depends on one's standards. If weighed against an abstract notion of "absolute" justice, creating a Palestinian state on only part of historic Palestine represents an historic injustice. If weighed against complete implementation of UN resolutions and international law, establishing a Palestinian state on only 22 percent of the land when the United Nations partition resolution designated 45 percent to become a Palestinian Arab state is not really fair.

In the real world, historical injustices sometimes become permanent. They do not become just or fair because time passes or power consolidates, but some parts of them do remain. The massive historical injustice that led to the dispossession and near-extermination of Native Americans in the first three hundred years of what would become the United States is no less unjust now. But how that continuing injustice can be addressed did in fact change. In the year 1702 it might have been possible to legitimately advocate sending the European colonists back to Europe and returning all the land to the Native Americans; three hundred years later that is not possible. Combinations of national recognition, economic reparations, affirmative action, protection of remaining tribal-held lands, and more are the new demands of Native Americans.

Certainly the Palestinian case is different. At the beginning of the 21st century al-Nakba, the catastrophe, in which Palestinians lost their land was just over fifty years past. Many Palestinians, now in their sixties, seventies or eighties, remember fleeing their homes and still hold the keys to the door they long imagined re-entering. It is not something familiar only through history books or dusty engravings. However, history has moved much faster in the last half a century than in the many years before it. With the shifts of the twentieth century, Israel has been consolidated as a vibrant, highly technologically advanced, powerfully armed western-oriented society under the absolute protection of the United States.

Palestine has the potential to reach as high a technological and scientific level, largely through the intellectual capital of its young and highly educated population. But it remains only a potential. Many, perhaps most, Palestinians and at least a few Israelis believe that once an independent and sovereign Palestinian state is consolidated, that the long-term best interests of both peoples will be found in merging the two small states into one, based on absolute equality for both nationalities and for all its citizens. Certainly such an approach could only result from a free and open choice by both Israelis and Palestinians. But considering such an option is for the

### **What caused the current crisis?**

The current crisis began in September 2000, after the Camp David summit had collapsed, and with it the hopes of Palestinians that the negotiations of the Oslo process would finally lead to an end to occupation and creation of an independent Palestinian state. The uprising, or "intifada," was sparked on September 27, 2000 by the highly provocative move by current Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to walk, accompanied by about 1,000 armed Israeli troops, on the Haram al-Sharif, or Noble Sanctuary, the Muslim holy site in East Jerusalem. The next day, Israeli troops opened fire on Palestinian protesters, some of whom were throwing stones, killing several Palestinians, some on the steps and inside the doorway of the al-Aqsa Mosque. What came to be called the "al-Aqsa Intifada" began that day.

### **Why is the current level of violence so intense?**

Israel has increasingly escalated the weapons it deployed against the Palestinians. Numerous respected human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Physicians for Human Rights, have documented Israeli soldiers employing excessive force in their suppression of Palestinian demonstrators. Their reports cite the use of live ammunition against unarmed civilians, attacks on medical personnel and installations, the use of snipers with high-powered rifles, and attacks on children.

As the intifada ground on, Israel escalated to the use of tank-mounted weapons, helicopter gunships firing wire-guided missiles on buildings and streets to carry out targeted assassinations, and finally F-16 fighter bombers which drop 2,000 pound bombs in refugee camps and on crowded apartment buildings.

Palestinians, unlike during the first intifada (1987-1993), had and used small arms, mainly rifles, against Israeli soldiers, tanks, and sometimes settlers. As the situation became more desperate, some young people turned themselves into suicide bombers, attacking either military checkpoints in the occupied territories, or civilian gathering spots inside Israel itself.

### **Isn't Israel just trying to fight against terrorism, just like the U.S. in Afghanistan?**

Whether or not one believes going to war in Afghanistan was an appropriate U.S. response to the crime against humanity committed on September 11, 2001, it is a far different scenario than that faced by Israel.

Israel has every right to arrest and try anyone attempting to attack civilians inside the country. But it does not have the right to occupy a neighboring country, and if it is serious about ending attacks on civilians, it must be serious about ending that occupation.

Israel is occupying Palestinian land and harshly controlling Palestinian lives; Palestinian violence, even those extreme and ultimately illegal actions such as lethal attacks on civilian targets, is a response to that occupation. Israel does not have the right, under international law or United Nations



resolutions, to continue its occupation, let alone to use violent methods to enforce it.

Since September 11, Israeli politicians led by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon have ratcheted up their rhetoric equating the U.S. “war on terrorism” in Afghanistan with Israeli assaults in the occupied Palestinian territories. Immediately after the September 11 attacks, former (and likely next) Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu blurted out, “It’s very good.” Then, editing his words, he added, “Well, not very good, but it will generate immediate sympathy.”

Israel has also used the escalating fear of terrorism in the U.S. after September 11 to increase its support (financial, diplomatic and political) from Congress and the American people. In fact, the Bush administration’s post-September 11 embrace of the extremist Sharon government has allowed new threats of even more dire Israeli attacks against Palestinians—up to and perhaps including forced “transfer” of Palestinians out of the occupied territories—to go unchallenged by Washington and to become part of normal political discourse inside Israel.

### **Who are the “suicide bombers” and why are they killing themselves and others?**

The intifada, or uprising, that began in September 2000 has seen a new phenomenon in Palestinian resistance—suicide bombings. These are attacks in which a young man or woman straps explosives around their body, and detonates the charge in a public place, killing themselves and often killing and injuring many people nearby.

Islamist organizations, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad which have generally (though not always) opposed Palestinian diplomatic efforts, have claimed responsibility for most of the suicide bombings. Beginning in early 2002, the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade linked to the mainstream Fatah organization led by Yasir Arafat, began a suicide bombing campaign inside Israel following the assassination of one of their leaders.

Some of the suicide bombings have been directed at military checkpoints or other military targets inside the occupied territories. Others, including some of those with the most serious civilian casualties, involved attacks on cafes, discos or other public places inside Israeli cities.

Arafat and the Palestinian Authority that he leads have repeatedly condemned suicide bombings inside Israel. Perhaps more influentially, leading Palestinian intellectuals and activists in the occupied territories and internationally have also rejected suicide attacks on civilians as a legitimate tactic of resistance, identifying them both as morally unacceptable and politically counter-productive.

### **Why are only Palestinians carrying out these suicide bombings?**

The pattern of bombings reflects the anger and hopelessness that has become endemic among the 3.2 million Palestinians living under military occupation. While organizations certainly orchestrate the attacks, the willingness of young people to contemplate suicide as an acceptable

### **Won’t a Palestinian state be a threat to Israel’s security? What about terrorism?**

Most Palestinian leaders have accepted the understanding that Palestine will be essentially an unarmed state, without any offensive weapons. Israel is by far the strongest military power in the region; it is one of the strongest military powers in the world. Israel’s nuclear capacity includes at least 200 high-density nuclear bombs, as well as a nuclear bomb production facility in the Negev desert at Dimona. Israel is not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and refuses to allow international inspection of its nuclear arsenal as the treaty would require. Israel’s military includes not only the newest and most advanced U.S.-produced fighter-bombers, helicopter gunships, missile defense systems and more, but relies on its own domestic production capacity as well, one of the most advanced arms manufacturing systems in the world. Palestine simply does not represent any threat to the national security of Israel.

The issue of the personal safety of individual Israelis is different. During the years of Israel’s occupation of Palestine, resistance to that occupation sometimes took illegal forms, including the attacks on civilians inside Israel. But the overwhelming majority of attacks on civilians, terrorist attacks, were in fact in response to Israel’s occupation; with the end of occupation, the overwhelming majority of attacks will end. Certainly both Israel and Palestine will have an obligation to protect their own citizens from cross-border (or internal) terrorist attacks. When a fully independent and sovereign Palestinian state can develop normal relations with Israel, as opposed to the distorted relationship of occupied and occupier, it will be possible to cooperate on security issues as well.

### **What would the Middle East region look like with a secure Israel and an independent Palestine living side by side?**

The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is one that has destabilized the entire Middle East region. Popular anger towards Israel because of its occupation of Palestine and the human rights violations inherent in that occupation, is sky-high and rising. Regional governments, themselves facing serious crises of legitimacy, have to balance their people’s rage against demands from the U.S. to maintain stability and some level of normal relations with Israel. Because most Arab regimes are so dependent on the United States—either economically (like Jordan), militarily (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar), or both (Egypt)—they have little choice but to accede to Washington’s wishes. But doing so further isolates them from their people, and raises the risks of instability and potentially even being overthrown.

An end to Israel’s occupation will immediately reduce tensions and instability in the region. The establishment of an independent Palestinian state and its normalization of relations with Israel as well as with surrounding Arab states will set the terms for regional normalization of ties with Israel, further easing Middle East tensions. Certainly many problems remain; Israel’s economy is many times larger than that of the surrounding Arab states, setting the threat of increasing inequity as the basis for region-

option reflects the widespread personal desperation caused by conditions of occupation.

People become willing to use their own body as a weapon when other means are unavailable. Because Palestinians have neither an organized army nor the plethora of F-16s, helicopter gunships, tanks, armored bulldozers that fill Israel's arsenal, the bodies of young men and women become weapons instead.

### **Are all Palestinians terrorists or supporters of terrorism?**

The U.S. State Department defines terrorism as: "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience." Under that definition, Palestinian attacks on civilians inside Israel would be considered terrorism; so would lethal attacks on Palestinian marketplaces by Israeli settlers in Hebron or elsewhere. Palestinian attacks on Israeli soldiers, military checkpoints or other military targets would not fall under the definition of "terrorism," although many U.S. politicians and pundits describe them as such.

The vast majority of Palestinians have never participated in any armed attack against anyone. Many, perhaps most, Palestinians are opposed to attacks on civilians anywhere, and many are opposed to any attacks inside Israel. In the spring of 2002 a large group of well-known Palestinian intellectuals signed a public statement condemning suicide bombings against civilians. But virtually all Palestinians understand the desperation and hopelessness that fuel the rage of suicide bombers and their increasing (and ever-younger) followers.

### **Why are Palestinians in Israel at all?**

When Israel was created as a state in 1948, 750,000 indigenous Palestinians, whose families had lived in Palestine for hundreds of years, were forcibly expelled by, or fled in terror of, the powerful militias that would soon become the army of the State of Israel. The one million or so Palestinians inside Israel today, who constitute just under 20 percent of the population, are those that remained and their descendants. Despite international law and specific UN resolutions, none of those forced into exile have been allowed to return. In fact, Israel's admission to the United Nations in 1948 was conditioned on its willingness to abide by General Assembly resolution 194 calling for repatriation and compensation.

From Israel's creation in 1948 until 1966, the indigenous Palestinian population inside the country lived under military rule. Since that time, Palestinians have been considered citizens, can vote and run for office; several Palestinians serve in the Israeli Knesset, or parliament. But not all rights inside Israel are granted on the basis of citizenship. Some rights and obligations, sometimes known as "nationality rights," favor Jews over non-Jews (who are overwhelmingly Palestinian) in social services, the right to own land, access to bank loans and education, military service and more.

## **PART FIVE**

# **The Future**

### **What would a just and comprehensive peace between Israel and Palestine look like?**

Almost all Palestinians today are looking for a solution based on international law and UN resolutions. That starts with the creation of a truly independent, sovereign, and democratic State of Palestine to be constructed on the 22 percent of historic Palestine that Israel occupied in 1967: the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. That means that all Israel troops would be withdrawn, and Israel's occupation would be ended. United Nations or other international monitors may be deployed on the borders around and between the two states to ensure the security of the borders.

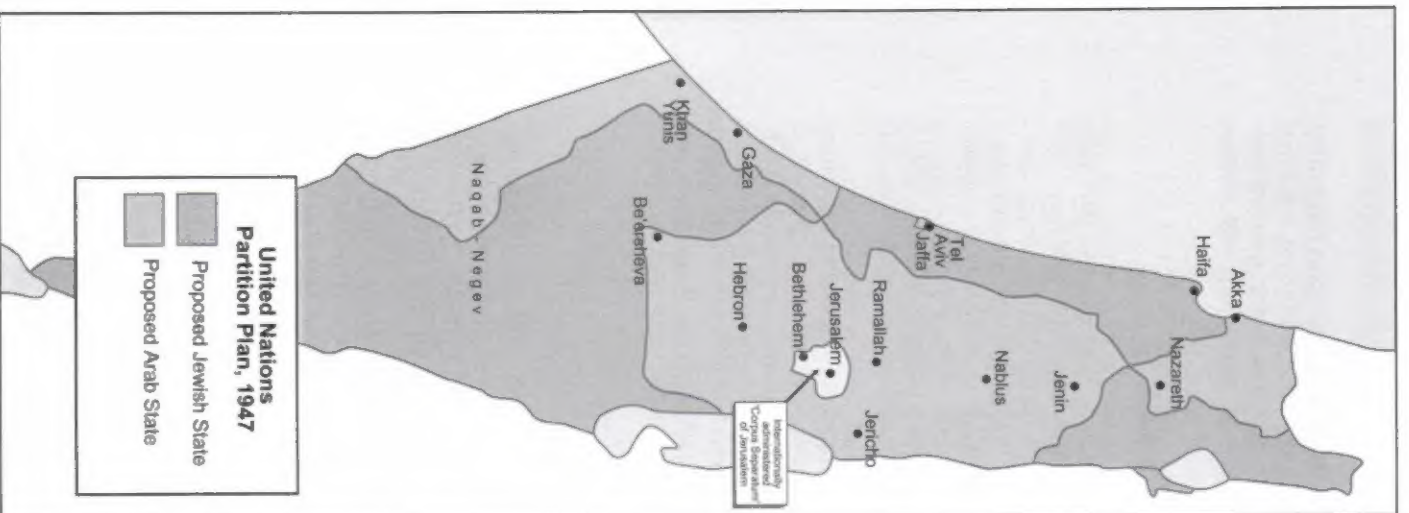
Israel and Palestine, as equals, would jointly exchange full diplomatic relations with each other. Israeli settlers would be given the option of moving to new homes inside Israel, or remaining in their homes as citizens of Palestine and accountable to the Palestinian government. Jerusalem would be an open city, with two separate capitals within it: the capital of Israel in West Jerusalem, and the capital of Palestine in East Jerusalem.

A comprehensive peace would also include recognition of the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes. That starts with Israel's recognition of its role in the expulsion of refugees and creation of the refugee crisis in 1948, and public acceptance of resolution 194 and the right of refugees to return as it legally agreed at the time Israel joined the United Nations in 1949. Following that recognition of the right, negotiations on implementation of the right can begin.

Each state would be responsible for maintaining the safety and security of its own citizens, and would make commitments to prevent any cross-border attacks on civilians in each other's territory.

A comprehensive and lasting peace will also require economic arrangements that move quickly to reverse the humanitarian disaster currently prevailing among Palestinians, as well as addressing the vast disparity of economic power between the two countries. Technology transfer and job creation should be among the approaches under consideration.





More than three times as many Palestinians live under Israeli military occupation in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, than remain inside Israel proper.

### What are the occupied territories?

After the 1947-48 war, the new state of Israel was created in 78 percent of what had been British Mandate Palestine under the League of Nations since 1922. The 22 percent that was left was made up of the Gaza Strip, a small piece of land along the Mediterranean coast abutting the Egyptian border, the West Bank, along the Jordan River, and Arab East Jerusalem. From the end of the British Mandate in 1948 until the June War of 1967, the Gaza Strip was controlled by Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem governed by Jordan.

In the 1967 War, Israel took over the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, the last 22 percent of historic Palestine. Those areas are now identified as the occupied territories.

### What does "military occupation" mean?

Military occupation means complete Israeli control over every facet of Palestinian civil and economic life. Israel has regularly closed its borders to the more than 125,000 Palestinian workers—primarily from Gaza—who rely on hard-scrabble jobs inside Israel for their still-insufficient income. Just from October 2000 through September 2001, the UN estimated that Palestinian workers lost between \$2.4 and \$3.2 billion in income due to closures. In April 2002, unemployment estimates

there. But the first part of the slogan hid the reality—for Palestine was not a land without a people. It's indigenous people had been there all along.

With the creation of Israel, the organizations of the Zionist movement such as the Jewish Agency became adjuncts of the state apparatus, focusing on recruiting and settling Jews from all over the world in Israel.



the spring of 2002 called explicitly for the replacement of the PLO chairman and President of the Palestinian Authority.

### **What is Zionism? Do all Jews support Zionism?**

Zionism is a political movement, one that calls for creation of a specifically Jewish state. When the movement began in the late 1880s, anti-Semitism was a powerful and growing force in Russia and Europe. Most Jews at that time believed that the best way to stop anti-Semitism was either through some kind of assimilation, or through alliances with other political movements. But a small number of Jews believed that anti-Semitism could never be overcome, and that the only way for Jews to be safe would be for them to leave their home countries and establish a Jewish state somewhere.

Early Zionist leaders believed that a Jewish state could be established anywhere (Uganda, Argentina, and Turkey were both considered at different times); it was a thoroughly secular movement. But the founder of the modern Zionist movement, Theodore Herzl, recognized that linking Zionism to Palestine would gain wider support among more Jews. Herzl also believed that a Jewish state could only be created with the support of a colonial sponsor, and he travelled the imperial capitals of the world seeking a patron.

Many Jews opposed Zionism. The ultra-orthodox Jews in Palestine believed that only God could deliver a state to the Jewish people, and that a human-based effort was against God's will. Many Jews facing anti-Semitic attacks rejected Zionism's call for them to leave their homelands, seeing that position as mimicking the demand of the anti-Semites themselves.

The Zionist movement won strong support from the British when London took control of Palestine with the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. In 1917 the Balfour Declaration stated that "His Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, ... it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine." In the stroke of a pen the vast majority of the population of Palestine was reduced to the "non-Jewish community".

Zionism gradually gained more adherents, though slowly. It was only in the 1930s and '40s, as German and Polish and other European Jews desperately sought to escape Hitler and their first choice countries of refuge, the U.S. and Britain, denied them entry, that Zionism and the call to create a Jewish state in Palestine, became a more popular view among Jews. After World War II, with Holocaust survivors filling Displaced Person camps across Europe, Zionism became the majority position.

The Zionist slogan was that Palestine was "a land without a people for a people without a land." Certainly the second part was true—the European Jews who had survived the Holocaust had lost everything—their homes, their families, their countries, their land. Turned away from the U.S. because of anti-Semitism, and encouraged to go to Palestine instead, it was not surprising that thousands flocked to join Jewish communities

from the World Bank and others were at 50 percent and rising across the Palestinian territories.

During the second intifada, the curfews and closures, or blockades, of Palestinian towns and cities, once an occasional disruption, became constant. The re-occupation of Palestinian cities was matched by a complete division of the West Bank into scores of tiny cantons—villages cut off from each other, small towns cut off from the main roads, cities surrounded like medieval sieges. Armed checkpoints, huge earth berms dug by armored tractors, destruction of roads, all served to prevent Palestinians from moving within the territories, let alone travelling into Israel. Inevitably the economic shortages were severe; truckloads of produce rotted in the sun at checkpoints, milk soured, workers could not get to their jobs. Humanitarian crises spiked, with women giving birth at checkpoints because soldiers would not allow them to pass, victims of settler or soldier violence dying because military officers would not authorize Palestinian ambulances to move. By August 2002 the U.S. Agency for International Development documented sharply escalated numbers of Palestinian children who were either acutely or chronically malnourished.

Israeli military control also means complete dependence on Israel for permits—to travel out of the country, to enter Israel from the West Bank to get to the airport to leave the country, for a doctor to move from her home village to her clinic in town, for a student to go to school. Most of the time, these permits remain out of reach.

### **Who are the Israeli settlers? Why are the Israeli settlements located outside Israel's borders?**

Immediately after the 1967 War, some extremist Israelis moved to establish Jewish colonies in the newly occupied territories. The first, created in Hebron in 1968, was led by an American-born Rabbi Meir Kahane and sanctioned by a Labor Party government. Israeli governments have justified construction of the settlements both for security and ideological reasons. The Labor Party, committed to Israeli military control of all land west of the Jordan River, justified settlements in the name of security. The right-wing Likud Bloc supported settlements to assert its claim of Jewish sovereignty over the entire Biblical-era "Greater Israel," and when a Likud government won power in 1977 settlement construction expanded dramatically.

As settler expansion increased, religious and nationalist extremists became a minority among the settlers themselves. Most moved to settlements in the occupied territories because government stipends keep mortgages low, amenities accessible, and commuting to jobs inside Israel easy because of a network of settler-only roads known as "bypass roads" for Jews only, designed to connect settlements to each other and to Israel without traversing Palestinian towns.

Since 1993, when the Oslo "peace process" began, the settler population has nearly doubled. More than 400,000 Israeli Jewish settlers now live in the occupied territories, 200,000 of them in Arab East Jerusalem. The Jerusalem settlers are particularly problematic, since Israel annexed East Jerusalem after the 1967 war, and many Israelis deny that East Jerusalem is occupied territory at all.



All the settlements are in violation of international law. Article 49 of the 4th Geneva Convention specifically prohibits an occupying power from transferring any part of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies. In fact international humanitarian law prohibits any permanent change to an occupied land, including imposed demographic changes, that are not intended to benefit the local [occupied] population.

U.S. administrations have identified the settlements variously as “illegal,” as “obstacles to peace,” and as “unhelpful.” President George W. Bush called for a settlement freeze in his speech on Middle East policy in April 2002, but has foresworn identifying the settlements as illegal or doing anything to encourage Israel to eliminate the settlements and return the settlers to homes inside Israel.

### **What do the Palestinians want?**

Many Palestinians, those in their 60s or older, remember being expelled from their homes inside what is now Israel but what was then Palestine, in 1947 or '48. Some of them still hold the keys to their homes that they kept as they fled, thinking they would be back in days or weeks. Many more remember the terror of being expelled from their homes in the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, finding minimal shelter in refugee camps that became home for 35 years or more. Palestinians want dignity, human rights, and a state of their own.

In 1988, in an enormous compromise, the Palestinian National Council, or parliament-in-exile, voted to accept a two-state solution that would return to Palestinians only the 22 percent of their land that had been occupied in 1967. They accepted that the other 78 percent would remain Israel. While some individual Palestinians and some small organizations still reject that historic compromise, for the vast majority of Palestinians the goal is for an independent state—a fully realized and truly independent state—in the West Bank and Gaza with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Palestinians also want the right for refugees to return to their homes, from wherever they were expelled. The right of return is part of international law, and Palestinians are specifically guaranteed that right by UN Resolution 194, which states that “refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return.”

Simply an end to “the violence” is insufficient, because it would leave in place the structures of military occupation that prevent Palestinians from realizing their full national rights and their human rights to dignity and independence.

### **What does Israel want?**

Most Jewish Israelis want to live their lives very much as they have been doing for the last decade or so, with an end to the attacks on civilians that have brought such fear to ordinary Israelis. Until its recent economic

In 1974 the United Nations invited the PLO leader to address the General Assembly. Yasser Arafat appeared bearing both a gun and an olive branch, and pleaded with delegates “do not let the olive branch fall from my hand.” That same year, the Assembly identified November 29th, anniversary of the day of the partition resolution years before, as an International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. It also recognized the PLO as the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people,” and invited the PLO to become an official non-state “observer” at the UN, allowing it participation in all debates, and welcoming a Palestinian ambassador.

While the PLO soon won diplomatic recognition in capitals across the world, Arab leaders were less than pleased at its independent stance. In Jordan, in particular, King Hussein saw the rise of the PLO as a threat to Jordan’s traditional influence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In 1982 when Ariel Sharon launched his “Jordan is Palestine” campaign, the king’s opposition was seen as less than enthusiastic. Only with the first intifada, when virtually unanimous Palestinian rejection of Jordan’s role became undeniable, did the king finally sever his kingdom’s links to Palestinian institutions.

When the PLO declared Palestine independent in 1988, the new state, which still controlled no land of its own, quickly attained diplomatic relations with more governments than recognized Israel.

To the U.S., the PLO was a terrorist organization and Yasser Arafat an arch-terrorist. It was the same epithet used to condemn Nelson Mandela’s African National Congress, and a host of other national liberation movements. It was the same, in fact, as the accusation the British hurled at Menachem Begin and other Zionist military leaders in the pre-state period of Israeli history. In 1975 Henry Kissinger had promised Israel that the U.S. would never recognize or negotiate with the PLO.

When the UN invited Arafat to address the General Assembly in November 1988, just after the Palestinian Declaration of Independence, Washington refused to issue a visa, despite its obligations as Host Country of the United Nations. The entire UN—diplomats, security guards, translators, secretariat staff—packed up and flew to Geneva for one day, to hear the PLO chairman. In that speech, Arafat again rejected terrorism and recognized Israeli; the goal was to open a dialogue with the U.S. In an internationally broadcast press conference Arafat read his speech; word came from Washington that it wasn’t good enough. The press corps was recalled to the auditorium in Geneva’s Palais des Nations, and the revised speech read out. In return, the U.S. allowed a mid-level diplomat, then ambassador to Tunisia, to open talks with the PLO. But the talks languished, and were soon cancelled.

Only with the Oslo process, when the Palestinians had accepted Washington’s centrality in the peace talks, did the U.S. accept the PLO as a full-fledged negotiating partner. During Bill Clinton’s presidency Yasser Arafat was one of the most frequent international visitors to the White House.

In the first two years of the Bush administration, however, Arafat remained untouchable. President Bush refused even to speak with the Palestinian leader when their paths crossed at the United Nations, and by



unease, and sporadic organizing campaigns, against the influx of Zionist European settlers, who were viewed as a threat to indigenous land ownership. But nation-states did not yet exist in the Arab world.

When the French and British divided up the Arab world as they took over from the defeated Ottoman empire, Palestine was demarcated with specific borders, and turned over to Great Britain to rule as a Mandate territory under the approval of the League of Nations. It was in that period that national rights and the demand for independence emerged among Palestinians. As more European settlers arrived, and the British made contradictory promises to the Arabs on one side and the Zionist leaders on the other, conflict escalated. Palestinian Arabs challenged the right of the new occupants to their land, and the legitimacy of the British overlords in protecting the immigrants; the Zionist settlers, similarly, saw the indigenous Arabs (they denied for decades that there was an identifiable Palestinian people) as an impediment to full settlement of the land, and resisted the British for placing any restrictions on the numbers of immigrants allowed in to Palestine.

That conflict, and the armed clashes that accompanied it, eventually led to the British decision that Palestine was ungovernable, and to turn Mandate authority over to the new United Nations. When the UN voted to partition Palestine in 1947, opposition came from the Arab states, but the only survey taken of Palestinian opinion to determine what they themselves wanted was ignored in the international debate. The Palestinians were given no voice. For many years popular sentiment among Palestinians reflected the call to reverse partition—to create a democratic and secular state for all its citizens in all of Israel and Palestine together.

The period after the 1967 War, when Israel occupied the last remnants of Palestine, corresponded with the rise of the PLO as a popular guerrilla organization. (It had originally been created by Arab governments in 1964.) The initial strategic approach of the PLO was the call for national rights in the context of a democratic secular state. By the mid-1970s, debate was underway within the organization about recognizing Israel and shifting to a two-state approach. In January 1976 the PLO, with support from Egypt, Syria, Jordan and the Soviet Union, introduced a resolution calling for a two-state solution. The U.S. vetoed the resolution.

In 1988 at the height of the first intifada the PLO's parliament-in-exile, the Palestine National Council voted to accept a two-state strategy while declaring Palestine an independent state.

### **How was the PLO viewed in the Arab Middle East, the UN and in the rest of the world?**

When the PLO was created, it was viewed by the Arab governments largely as an instrument of their own interests. Only after the guerrilla organizations became the major components of the PLO, and Yasser Arafat became its leader in 1968, did it take on greater credibility among Palestinians themselves. During the early 1970s political campaigns among Palestinian communities in the occupied territories, in refugee camps and throughout the world, led to virtual unanimous support for the PLO as the voice of the still-stateless Palestinians.

downturn, Israel had been the 17th wealthiest country in the world, with a high standard of living and close ties to Europe and the U.S.

Only a minority of Israelis, according to the polls, are committed to holding on to the occupied territories, but the majority, willing to return the territories to the Palestinians and end the occupation, has not been able to influence Israel's successive governments to do just that. Since the intifada began in September 2000, many Israelis have taken up the view that Palestinian violence can somehow be quashed by ever-increasing use of force, while leaving the occupation intact. Despite its failure so far, a majority still seem to accept or support that position.

For most Israelis, an end to Palestinian violence would be sufficient, even if the occupation remained intact.

### **If Jerusalem is the capital of Israel, why are there so many Palestinians in the eastern part of the city?**

During the 1947-48 War, the Israeli military conquered only the western half of the city, most of which was owned by Palestinian Arabs, and declared it the capital of Israel. East Jerusalem remained virtually entirely Palestinian, with the exception of a handful of religious Jews who remained in the Old City's ancient Jewish Quarter, during the years under Jordanian administration. Israeli Jews were prohibited from entering East Jerusalem, and Palestinians were kept out of West Jerusalem. In 1967, when the Israeli army conquered East Jerusalem along with the West Bank, Gaza Strip, the Syrian Golan Heights and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, one of Israel's first acts was to declare Jerusalem an eternally "united" city. In fact it was never unified; the old border, or Green Line, was legally erased, but remained vivid in the minds of Jerusalemites on both sides. During the first intifada, from 1987-1993, taxi drivers from West Jerusalem would routinely refuse to take passengers into the eastern part of the city, claiming they or their passengers would be at risk.

But beginning immediately after the 1967 occupation, Israel began building huge settlements blocs within East Jerusalem, such as French Hill and Pisagot, which were quickly incorporated into Jewish Jerusalem and never acknowledged as settlements. There are now 200,000 Israeli Jews living in East Jerusalem settlements primarily defined as "neighborhoods."

Simultaneously, Palestinian Jerusalemites found their rights severely constrained. Permits for building new houses or additions to over-crowded homes are virtually unobtainable for Palestinians. Marrying a partner from outside the city can put one's residency permit at risk. Arabs in East Jerusalem are considered legal residents—thus they have the right to vote for city council—but are denied full Israeli citizenship.

### **Who controls the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip?**

Israel occupied those areas in the 1967 Six-Day War, and maintains military control of all of them through checkpoints, soldiers and weapons. The 1993 Oslo peace process brought about a division of the West Bank into "A, B and C" areas. The B area (over 400 villages) which amounted to 23

percent of the West Bank and C area, 70 percent (settlements, army camps and state land which used to be cultivated by Palestinian farmers) remained officially under Israeli control, while areas A (the cities) which amounted to only about 3 percent of the West Bank, were ostensibly placed under Palestinian security control. But the Palestinian-controlled areas were tiny islands surrounded by roads and lands that remained under direct Israeli military occupation. And by 2002, during the Palestinian uprising, Israel moved to re-occupy all but one of the major cities that were supposed to be under Palestinian control.

The re-occupation made clear that Oslo's version of Palestinian "control" was incomplete and thoroughly reversible; Israeli military occupation remained in place.

### **Why does Israel still occupy those areas?**

The first settlers after the 1967 War established settlements as part of asserting Jewish control over all of Palestine, which they called "Eretz Israel," or the "Land of Israel." Later settlers, and the governments who supported them, claimed the settlements, especially those in the Jordan Valley, played a vital role in protecting Israel from possible attack from Arab states to the east.

In the 1990s "yuppie settlers," uninterested in nationalist or religious rationales and concerned only with the amenities of settler life, became the majority; most indicated they would be willing to give up their homes if they were properly compensated. But increasingly, the minority of ideologically driven settlers became far more powerful than their numbers, especially within the ranks of the right-wing Likud Bloc led by Benjamin Netanyahu and then by Ariel Sharon. Holding on to the settlements, even the most isolated, became an article of faith and a domestic political necessity for one Israeli government after another. Sharon himself said that Netzarim, a tiny isolated settlement in Gaza, was "the same as Tel Aviv" in importance.

Beyond the politics and the largely hyperbolic claims of military protection, the settlements do play one important role in Israeli national life. They allow the diversion of almost all of the West Bank water sources, its underground aquifers, to Israeli settlements and ultimately into Israel itself. Indigenous Palestinians, farmers on parched land and villagers with insufficient water pressure even for a household tap, pay the price for the diversion of water, as they watch the settlements' sparkling swimming pools and verdant, sprinkler-watered lawns.

### **Who are the Palestinians? Where did they come from?**

Palestinian Arabs are descendants of the vast Arab/Islamic empire that from the seventh century, had dominated Palestine with the rise of Arabic language and Arab/Islamic culture. While the majority of Palestinians were peasants, Palestinian cities, especially Jerusalem, were hubs of Arab civilization, where scholars, poets and scientists congregated and where, enriched by a constant influx of traders, they forged the city's identity as an

new settlements. At the same time, Israel was having even more difficulties with the new president of Lebanon, Bashir Gemayel. Tel Aviv had expected Gemayel to be "their man" in Beirut, but unexpectedly Gemayel was emerging as a Lebanese nationalist instead.

On September 11th, two weeks before the end of their official mandate, the last U.S. Marines were withdrawn from Beirut. Three days later, Gemayel was assassinated. Within hours, Israel responded by invading the Muslim- (and formerly Palestinian-) dominated West Beirut. It was in complete violation of the guarantees of protection that were the basis for the agreement the U.S. had negotiated with the PLO. After a few hours, Defense Minister Sharon announced that the Christian Phalangists, the most anti-Palestinian of all the Christian militias, would actually enter the Palestinian camps, rather than the Israelis themselves. The senior Israeli commander met with the top Phalangist leaders and told them, he said, "to act humanely, and not to harm women, children and old people."

On Thursday, September 16, Israeli troops lit flares to light the way for their Phalangist allies to enter the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, on the outskirts of West Beirut. The massacre of unarmed children, women and old men went on for three days. It resulted in the deaths of between 2,000 and 3,000 Palestinians, most of them left piled up or hastily buried in mass graves. The Red Cross later said it would be impossible to know the exact number who died.

There was no question that the Israeli soldiers knew what was going on inside—it was visible even without their high-powered binoculars, and the sound of machine-gun fire continued throughout the days and nights. Finally the U.S. pushed Israel to withdraw the Phalangists. The Los Angeles Times reported that U.S. Special Envoy Morris Draper told the Israeli officers that "you must stop the massacres. They are obscene. I have an officer in the camp counting the bodies. ... They are killing children. You are in absolute control of the area and therefore responsible for that area."

Israel would remain occupying a strip of south Lebanon until 2000, when the mounting deaths and injuries of young Israeli soldiers at the hands of Hizbullah resistance forces brought about a political outcry inside Israel. The occupation was finally ended unilaterally, implementing most of the requirements of resolution 425 twenty-two years after it was passed.

### **Were the Palestinians demanding national rights and an independent state before the 1967 war?**

Like most parts of the Arab world, national consciousness in Palestine grew in the context of demographic changes and shifts in colonial control. During the 400 years of Ottoman Turkish control, Palestine was an identifiable region within the larger empire, but linked closely with what was then known as Greater Syria. With World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Palestine became part of the British Empire. But even before that, beginning in the 1880s, the increasing influx of European Jewish settlers brought about a new national identity—a distinctly Palestinian consciousness—among the Muslims and Christians who were the overwhelming majority of Palestinian society. There was widespread



May 1982, Israel's Defense Minister Ariel Sharon went to Washington, to meet with President Reagan's Secretary of State Alexander Haig. Former President Jimmy Carter said after a national security briefing that "the word I got from very knowledgeable people in Israel is that 'we have a green light from Washington.'"

Then a new provocation was created. On June 3, a renegade, anti-PLO Palestinian faction attempted to assassinate Israel's ambassador in London. The British police immediately identified Abu Nidal's forces as responsible, and revealed that PLO leaders themselves were among the names on the would-be assassins' hit list. The PLO had nothing to do with the London attack. But Israel claimed the attack (the ambassador remained unhurt) was a justification for war. Three days later, on June 6, 1982 the Israeli army invaded Lebanon in operation "Peace for Galilee," crossing the Litani River and moving almost as far north as Beirut, destroying the feeble resistance from local villagers and from United Nations peacekeeping troops swept aside in the assault. Israel remained in virtually uncontested control of the air, and had overwhelming military superiority on land and sea. Beirut was besieged and subjected to merciless bombing for two months. Casualties were enormous, totalling more than 17,000 Lebanese and Palestinians, mostly civilians. Hospitals were hit, the Palestinian refugee camps were levelled in massive bombardment.

Israel relied overwhelmingly on U.S.-supplied planes, bombs and other military equipment. But despite existing laws mandating that U.S. military supplies be used only for defensive purposes, no one in Washington complained. The New York Times said "American weapons were justly used to break the PLO." The Reagan administration and Congress both tried to outdo the other in calls to raise U.S. aid to Israel. Throughout June and July the siege of Beirut continued, with everyone in the city deprived of most food, water, electricity and safety. The bombing increased in early August, leading to a day of eleven solid hours of bombing on August 12. Condemnation poured in from around the world, and even the U.S. issued a mild criticism of the bombing. A ceasefire was soon achieved.

The U.S. brokered its terms, which centered on the PLO leaving Beirut—its guerrillas, its doctors, its civilian infrastructure, its officials—everyone and everything would board ship heading for Tunis, almost as far from Palestine as you could get and still be in the Arab world. The U.S. agreed to serve as guarantor of Israel's promises, as protector of the Palestinian civilians, primarily women, children and old men, left behind. U.S. Marines were deployed as the centerpiece of an international force with a 30-day mandate to guard Beirut during the withdrawal of the PLO fighters.

#### What caused the Sabra-Shatila massacre in Lebanon?

On September 1st, President Reagan announced a new peace initiative between Israel and the Palestinians, that included a freeze on new settlements, limited autonomy for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and some version of a "Jordanian solution," plus lots of new economic and military aid for Israel. But Israel rejected the Reagan plan, and the initiative remained stalled; in the West Bank, Israel immediately launched several

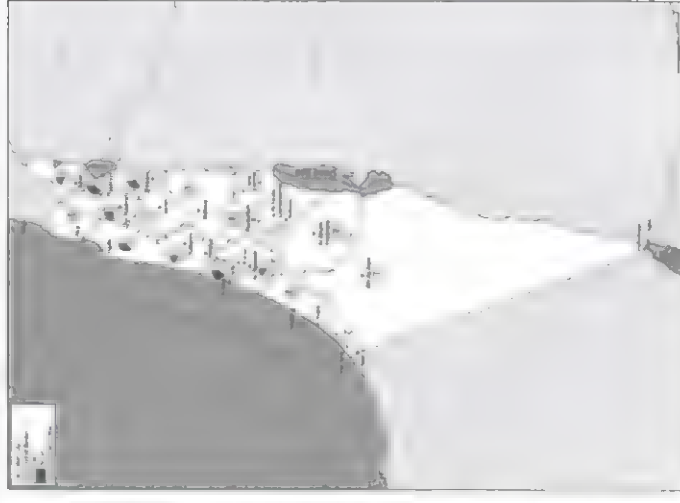
important national center. Islam's religious and moral teachings remained the dominant social forces, but small indigenous Jewish communities remained. They were the remnants of Palestine's ancient Jewish kingdom that was conquered by Rome in 70 AD, its people largely scattered. Along with groups of Christians, those Palestinian Jews maintained their faith and separate communal identities within broader Palestinian society throughout the rise of Islam. Like most parts of the Arab world, national consciousness for Palestinians grew in the context of demographic changes and shifts in colonial control. During the 400 years of Ottoman Turkish control, Palestine was an identifiable region within the larger empire, but linked closely with what was then known as Greater Syria.

With World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Palestine became part of the British Empire. But even before that, beginning in the 1880s, the increasing influx of European Jewish settlers, brought about a new national identity—a distinctly Palestinian consciousness—among the Muslims and Christians who were the overwhelming majority of Palestinian society. The indigenous Palestinians—Muslims and Christians—fought the colonial ambitions of European Jewish settlers, British colonial rule during the inter-war period, and the Israeli occupation since 1948 and 1967.

#### Why are Palestinians still living in refugee camps? Where are they from and why don't they go home?

When Palestinians were expelled from their homes in the 1947-48 War, many fled to neighboring Arab countries, others to the parts of Palestine not yet under the control of the new Israeli army, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In all those places, corrupt and/or impoverished Arab governments had neither the will nor the resources to care for the sudden influx of refugees. The United Nations, recognizing its responsibility for the crisis through its role in dividing Palestine in the first place, took on the work of caring for the new exiles. It created The United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA), designed to provide basic housing, food, medical care and education to the Palestinian refugees until they could return home; UNRWA was initially envisioned as a short-term project.

Palestine under the British Mandate, 1923-1948



## Palestinian Refugees: UNRWA Refugee Camps, 2001



But Israel refused to allow the refugees to return home. Instead the months turned to years, and tent camps were transformed over time into squalid, crowded mini-towns, made up of concrete block houses with tin roofs held down by old tires and sometimes scraps of iron bars. Electricity is sporadic, indoor plumbing often non-existent; streams of raw sewage are a regular feature between tightly-packed houses. But UNRWA schools educated Palestinian children to the extent that Palestinians today have the highest percentage of college educated people in the entire Arab world.

Some have claimed that Arab governments used Palestinian refugees to score propaganda points, or to divert their own people's anger from the regimes to Israel. Certainly the Arab regimes had little interest in serious political defense of Palestinian rights, let alone serious protection of Palestinian refugees. Only Jordan allowed Palestinians to become citizens. Everywhere else, Palestinians were kept segregated. In Lebanon, they were viewed as a potential disruption to the country's delicate confessional system balancing Christians and Muslims. Egypt kept the Palestinians confined to the Gaza Strip.

But the refugee camps remained in place primarily because Israel blocked their right of return, and the Palestinians themselves were determined they wanted to go home—they did not want to be “integrated” into other countries, despite the common language. Palestinians were—and remained—afraid that leaving the camps to integrate into some other part of the Arab world would result in the loss of their homes and their rights. The Arab world after 1948 was no longer an integrated “Arabia”—nation states had been created, by lines drawn in the sand by colonial pow-

be expanded to include Cold War battlefields much farther afield—places like Angola, Mozambique, El Salvador, Chile, Guatemala—where Israeli military assistance, training, and arms bolstered unsavory U.S. allies.

Just ten days after the Six-Day War ended, a State Department memo noted “Israel has probably done more for the U.S. in the Middle East in relation to money and effort invested than any of our so-called allies and friends elsewhere around the world since the end of the Second World War. In the Far East, we can get almost nobody to help us in Viet Nam. Here, the Israelis won the war singlehandedly, have taken us off the hook, and have served our interests as well as theirs.”

The reward, for Israel, was a flood of sophisticated weapons, including advanced Phantom jets. In the four years after the 1967 war, Israel would receive \$1.5 billion in U.S. arms—ten times as much as the total for the last twenty years.

Given all of that, Israel’s occupation of Palestinian land was hardly a concern for Washington. Over the years different U.S. presidents criticized the settlements in the occupied territories, variously describing them as “unhelpful,” “obstacles to peace,” or, briefly, “illegal.” But little action matched the words. America’s presumed strategic interests seemed to outweigh humanitarian and legal concerns in the Middle East.

### What was the 1982 Lebanon war all about? What was Ariel Sharon’s role?

In 1970, after a bitter battle with the Jordanian military, the PLO moved its headquarters from Jordan to Lebanon. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinian civilians followed, and the existing camps in Lebanon were soon crowded with refugees. Lebanon played a regional role, and was soon a key focal point in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

With hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees living in Beirut and southern Lebanon, much of the governing, from schools and hospitals to licensing and legal systems, was taken over by the PLO. From 1975 Lebanon was stuck in a bloody civil war, pitting sectarian and religious factions against each other. Palestinian guerrillas and Israeli troops also continued to trade rocket fire across the Israeli-Lebanese border. In 1978, Israel took over a strip of southern Lebanon, and continued to occupy it in defiance of UN Resolution 425 which called for Israel to immediately and unconditionally withdraw. Instead of withdrawing, Israel sponsored an anti-Palestinian Christian-led militia, called the South Lebanon Army, by arming, paying, training and supporting them in the occupied zone.

Israel’s real goal was to destroy the PLO infrastructure—social as well as military—in Lebanon, and to put in place a compliant, pro-Israeli regime in Beirut. In 1982, when it appeared that Lebanon’s civil war could drag on forever without those goals being achieved, Israel decided to move on its own. But first Tel Aviv needed to be sure its allies in Washington would approve.

It was a little bit tricky. After all, the U.S.-brokered ceasefire between Israel and the PLO in south Lebanon and across Israel’s northern border had held for almost a year. There wasn’t an obvious provocation on which to claim that a direct Israeli invasion was “necessary for self-defense.” In



nations simply keeping, as a colony or to expand existing territorial control, the nations it conquered and occupied. This practice was finally deemed unacceptable, and Security Council resolution 242, on which most future Israel-Palestine negotiations would be based, asserted "the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war." It was an unequivocal position.

Other parts of the resolution were less precise. While almost every nation agreed that Israel should return all of the captured territories it was occupying, there was some diplomatic wrangling with the U.S. The final result was a dodge: the French version called for the return of "the territories," implying all that Israel held; the English version spoke of returning "territories," leaving open the possibility that partial return might be acceptable. From that moment, Israel adopted the position that it was not obligated to return all the territories. With the return of the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt after the [first] Camp David Accords of 1979 between Israel and Egypt, Israel claimed that since the virtually unpopulated Sinai desert represented the largest percentage of land it had occupied in '67, its return to Egypt should be sufficient to meet the UN's demand. Any further return of occupied land, to Palestinians or Syria, would be at Israel's choice and on Israel's terms.

From 1967 until today, the UN has passed numerous resolutions calling for an end to Israel's occupation, but those resolutions remain unfulfilled.

#### **What was the U.S. relationship to the occupation?**

At the time of the Six-Day War U.S. relations with Israel were friendly and supportive, but not anything close to the "special relationship" that defines U.S.-Israeli ties today. In 1967 the Pentagon predicted that the balance of forces was so one-sided that no matter who struck first, no combination of Arab forces would overcome Israel's superior strength. But nonetheless, on May 25th the Pentagon sent battalions of Marines to the Sixth Fleet, then cruising the Mediterranean, in case they were needed to bolster Israel. By June 2, the date was set for Israel to teach Syria and Egypt the long-awaited "lesson." But first Israel needed permission from the U.S. On June 4, even as Nasser was negotiating with the U.S. representative in Cairo, President Lyndon Johnson telegraphed Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, and gave Israel the final green light. The next day, Dayan ordered the attack.

After the War, relations between Washington and Tel Aviv became much closer. In the U.S., the war was presented as evidence of a heroic Israel triumphing over the aggressive Arab Goliath. Support skyrocketed for closer U.S. ties to Israel. Fundraising by Zionist organizations, blood drives, volunteer campaigns all soared. During the six days of the war, the United Jewish Appeal sold \$220 million worth of Israeli bonds; American contributions for Israel in 1967 totalled \$600 million.

But the biggest gain was not those individual contributions. Even more important was the new recognition in Washington of the role Israel could play. It was the Cold War, after all, and Israel's military prowess showed U.S. policymakers how valuable an ally it could be as the regional policeman for U.S. Middle East interests. Soon Israel's junior partner role would

ers as in so many places, and ties of nation combined with ties of village or town to create for Palestinians a national cry for returning home.

#### **What is the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)?**

In 1964 the PLO was created and largely controlled by leaders of the Arab states. At the same time, small groups of Palestinian activists were building nationalist organizations, some of which, the fedayeen, moved towards guerrilla tactics to challenge Israel. In 1968, Yasir Arafat became head of the PLO, uniting a number of factions who advocated a wide range of tactics and political principles. The organization was cobbled together in a complicated web of eight separate political factions represented in the leadership; a broadly representative parliament-in-exile, the Palestine National Council; and a host of sector-based institutions including the students and women's unions, medical and relief agencies, and more. In many Palestinian-populated areas, particularly in Jordan and then in Lebanon, the PLO took on the responsibilities of, and often the trappings of, a full government.

In the early years the PLO demand was for a democratic secular state in all of Palestine—including what was now Israel as well as the occupied territories. There was no recognition of Israel having the right to exist as a separate Jewish state. But as the shock of the 1967 War and the resulting occupation began to wear off, Palestinians began to broaden their strategic approach. By the mid-70s, the majority view in the PLO accepted the idea of a two-state solution, an approach already accepted in the UN and elsewhere as reflecting an international consensus. In Israel, where refusal to even consider negotiations with the PLO was the norm, such a shift was viewed as potentially damaging, as it stripped away the key rationale for Israeli antagonism towards all Palestinian claims.

In 1974 the United Nations General Assembly recognized the PLO as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." It established November 29th (the day the original partition resolution was signed) as an International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, and invited the PLO to participate as an Observer within the General Assembly and other UN agencies.

In January 1976, a PLO-drafted resolution backed by a number of Arab countries as well as the Soviet Union, was put before the UN Security Council, calling for a two-state solution, Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders, and other aspects of the international consensus. Israel refused to participate in the meeting, and the U.S. cast its veto, killing the resolution.

In 1982, the PLO led the joint Lebanese-Palestinian resistance to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and weeks-long bombardment of Beirut. Soon after, diplomatic efforts led to the organization's expulsion from Lebanon, with thousands of PLO activists and fighters boarding ships to a new, long exile in Tunis.

Still, the two-state approach remained the majority view within the PLO for some years. In 1988, at the height of the first intifada, or uprising, it became official when the Palestine National Council convened in Algiers. In a unanimous vote, the PNC proclaimed the "establishment of

the State of Palestine on our Palestinian territory with its capital Jerusalem.” Within the political program was official recognition of the two-state approach, despite the fact that the PLO was still an outlawed “terrorist” organization to Israel, and PLO officials were prohibited from even visiting Israel or the occupied territories.

The U.S. opened mid-level diplomatic ties with the PLO a month later, but the organization remained excluded from the U.S.-led international diplomatic efforts. With the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the PLO’s decision to side with Iraq resulted in intense anger from the oil-rich Gulf countries that had long bankrolled the organization. Palestinians were summarily expelled from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other Gulf states, and the PLO fell into severe poverty and political isolation in the region.

After the Gulf War, with the PLO at perhaps its weakest point, the U.S. government, flush with its victory over Iraq, approached the PLO to negotiate Palestinian participation in the post-War peace talks in Madrid. The terms were dire—no separate Palestinian delegation, participation only as a sub-set of the Jordanian team, no participation for PLO members, no participation for Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, no role for the United Nations—and the PNC vote was bitterly contested. But eventually, the PLO, through its well-known but officially unacknowledged representatives in the occupied territories, accepted. The talks, ostensibly based on UN resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of land for peace, ground on uneventfully for almost two years, when the surprise announcement hit the press that secret Israeli-PLO talks had been underway in Oslo, and that a Declaration of Principles was about to be signed.

The ceremony on the White House lawn on September 13, 1993 in which President Clinton presided over a handshake between a reluctant Yitzhak Rabin and an eager Yasir Arafat provided a photo-op of global proportions. A Nobel Prize for Peace, split between Arafat, Rabin and the Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres, soon followed. The Oslo process was born.

Within two years and extensive negotiations, Oslo’s substantive agreements were signed; their crucial beginnings allowed the return of all the PLO exiles from Tunis to the West Bank and Gaza, where they would be allowed to create a new Palestinian Authority to administer small parts of the still-occupied territories under overall Israeli “security” control.

### **What is the Palestinian Authority (PA)?**

The PA was created under the terms of the Oslo peace process. It is a quasi-governmental body, with derivative power limited to what is granted to it (or taken away from it) by Israel. It is not a fully independent government, even in the limited areas under its jurisdiction from which Israeli troops withdrew, but rather analogous to a municipal council, with carefully delimited authority. It has the authority, in most Palestinian towns and cities, to orchestrate day-to-day life for residents, but not to control the land. It has responsibility to run the schools and

For most families, particularly the half the population who lived in the refugee camps, it was a daily struggle to meet the most basic needs.

Israel’s military presence was everywhere, although the closures and curfews that became commonplace later were rare. The PLO was outlawed, and expressions of support for it could land one in prison. Arrests, indefinite detention and even expulsions were common. Israel tried to create a compliant leadership to compete with the PLO; nationalist political figures, such as the popularly-elected local mayors, were targeted by Israelis. In one incident three mayors were attacked, killing one and leaving two badly maimed. There was an international consensus on ending the occupation and creating a Palestinian state, but there seemed to be no way to implement that view. The UN was unable to enforce its resolutions because the U.S. protected Israel’s occupation. Arab governments talked of liberating Jerusalem and supporting Palestinian rights, but it remained all talk. International law seemed far away.

### **How did Israel come to be in control of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem?**

The 1967 Six-Day War began with Israel’s attack on the Egyptian air force, which was wiped out within a few hours. Some argue that Israel’s first strike was justified because Egypt, Syria and Jordan were massing armies near Israel’s borders. Certainly the tensions on all sides was on the rise. Egypt’s nationalist president, Gamal Abdul Nasser, demanded that the UN withdraw its emergency forces stationed on Egyptian territory since the 1956 Anglo-French-Israeli attack on Egypt. Although Israel refused to grant the UN the right to station forces on its side of the border in 1956, it considered the withdrawal as a justification to go to war against Egypt.

But war still might have been prevented; just before Israel struck, Nasser had agreed to send his vice-president to Washington for negotiations. Israel’s attack was at least partly to prevent a face-saving stand-down for Nasser. Israeli and U.S. military officials agreed that the war had been Israel’s decision. Israel’s right-wing Likud Bloc leader and later prime minister Menachem Begin told the Pentagon’s Army War College in 1982 that “in June 1967 we again had a choice. The Egyptian Army concentrations in the Sinai approaches do not prove that Nasser was really about to attack us. We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him.”

Whatever one thinks about the legitimacy of Israel’s war, it was clearly aimed at the Arab states surrounding Israel—but it was the Palestinians who paid the highest price. Even after the ceasefire, Israeli troops moved into Syria and captured the Golan Heights; 90,000 Golan Arabs were expelled. By the end of the war, Israel occupied Syria’s Golan Heights, the Egyptian Sinai, and the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza Strip. Two hundred fifty thousand more Palestinians were forced into exile, and over a million more were now under Israeli military occupation.

### **What was the international community’s response to the 1967 War?**

The 1967 War provided the United Nations with its first opportunity to articulate a clear position on the once-accepted practice of victorious



adults built their future hopes around creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.

Repression, despair, and for some, passivity all grew. Then an incident occurred. On December 8, 1987, near the densely crowded checkpoint at the entrance to the Gaza Strip. It involved an Israeli truck that swerved, and struck and killed four Palestinians: a doctor, an engineer, and two laborers. Some said it was deliberate, though no one knew for sure. What was different was the outcome. Palestinian outrage sparked an uprising that swept across the Gaza Strip, spread to the West Bank, and set into motion a blaze of nationalist resistance to occupation.

The uprising soon came to be called the "intifada," a word whose Arabic roots refer to rising up, or shaking off. It began as spontaneous actions, stone-throwing children and young people challenging the troops and tanks of Israel's occupying army. But soon it became more organized, as existing grassroots organizations, most of them linked to various factions of the PLO, mobilized to respond to new conditions, and to answer needs of the population in the context of Israel's increasingly repressive response.

Women's, workers, medical, students, agricultural, and community organizations took on new tasks—growing food in home and community gardens to replace the Israeli goods now being boycotted; guarding village streets at night with whistles to warn of soldiers on their way; mobile clinics to provide emergency medical help to villages or towns under curfew; tax protests; enforcement of a soon-declared daily commercial strike that shut down Palestinian businesses at noon. Leadership emerged clandestinely, with leaflets distributed overnight providing information about coming strike days, special commemorations of the intifada, or particular constituencies to be mobilized at particular times.

But throughout, there was a unified view that only the PLO, with its leadership in exile in Tunis, could speak for the Palestinians. Every international envoy who showed up in East Jerusalem or Ramallah or Gaza City was told the same thing: our address is in Tunis. If you want to engage us diplomatically, talk to the PLO.

And while there were some diplomatic gains, by far the major advance of the intifada was visible internally, within Palestinian society itself. The opening up of new ideas, new empowerment of women and young people, new levels of community support and participation, all would last beyond the intifada itself.

It was only with the exaggerated enthusiasm that greeted the signing of Oslo's Declaration of Principles, in September 1993, that the first intifada began to wind down. For the next seven years, Oslo, rather than intifada, would be the code word on everyone's tongue.

#### **What were conditions like in the occupied territories before the first intifada?**

In some ways it was surprising that the uprising did not erupt earlier. Conditions were dire, jobs few, money scarce. Education was central to Palestinian families, and many young university graduates headed abroad for professional training or to find work as doctors, engineers and more.

hospitals, clean the streets and keep economic and social life functioning, but it is denied the authority to control its own borders, it does not have any authority over Israeli soldiers or settlers within or surrounding its land, it does not control a single contiguous territory but rather scores of scattered and disconnected areas, and according to the language of the Oslo agreements, any law passed by the PA's parliament is subject to approval or rejection by Israel.

Beginning in the spring of 2002, as the uprising escalated, Israel moved to re-occupy almost all of Palestine's major cities from which its troops had been withdrawn under the terms of Oslo. While Palestinian resistance was fierce in one or two of the cities (Jenin and Nablus in particular), the speed of the Israeli military's return gave the lie to any notion that Palestinian control, even partial, was designed to be permanent.

#### **Who are the Israelis? Where did they come from?**

Israel defines itself as a state of and for the Jewish people, and about 80 percent of the population are Jews. It is, however, a country of immigrants, and unlike the indigenous Palestinian Israelis, the vast majority of Jewish Israelis (or their ancestors) have come to Israel from all over the world in the last 120 years, but mostly since 1948. The tiny communities of indigenous and intensely orthodox Jewish communities in places like Safed and Jerusalem, have largely remained separate from mainstream or even the "regular" ultra-orthodox Israeli Jewish population.

Two-thirds or so of Israel's Jews are Arabs—they or their ancestors emigrated to Israel from Morocco or Yemen, from Iraq or elsewhere in the Arab world. A small percentage of Israeli Jews are Africans, mainly Ethiopians; and the rest are what is known as Ashkenazi, or European Jews, of which about one-fifth are Russians who arrived in the 1990s.

It was European and Russian Jews, back in the 1880s, who first began significant Jewish immigration to what was then Ottoman Turkish- and later British-ruled Palestine. They came fleeing persecution and violent pogroms, or communal attacks, in czarist Russia and eastern Europe, and they came in answer to mobilizations organized by a movement known as Zionism, which called for all Jews to leave their countries of origin to live in a Jewish state in Palestine. The use of Hebrew, created as a modern language in the early 1900s, an orientation towards Europe and the U.S. rather than to the neighboring Middle East, and nearly universal military service (excepting only Arabs and ultra-orthodox Jews) became the central anchors around which national consciousness was built.

Israel defines itself as a state of the entire Jewish people, not simply a state for its own citizens. It encourages Jewish immigration through what is known as the Law of Return, under which any Jew born anywhere in the world, with or without pre-existing ties to Israel, has the right to claim immediate citizenship upon arrival in Israel, and the right to all the privileges of being Jewish in a Jewish state—including state-financed language classes, housing, job placement, medical and welfare benefits, etc. In most circumstances only Jews have the right to immi-

grate to Israeli; the indigenous Palestinians and their ancestors are denied that right despite the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

### **What's the difference between Jews and Israelis?**

Technically Jews are a religious grouping; in the real world Jews are defined by a complex web of religious, cultural, ethnic and other communal ties. Israelis (excluding Palestinian citizens of Israel) are Jews who are Israeli citizens.

Language often gets confusing, and is often used in sloppy ways, both internationally and within Israel itself, where "Jews" is often used interchangeably with "Israelis" or "settlers." As a result, Palestinians in the occupied territories often fall into the habit of conflating the terms.

role, and the resulting recognition that Madrid was a failure, may have set the stage for a new level of Palestinian urgency in the Oslo talks.

### **What happened to Israel and Palestine during the 1991 Gulf War?**

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait opened a huge rift in an Arab world once unified, at least rhetorically, in support of Palestinian rights. Siding with Iraq, the Palestinians were quickly ostracized by many, particularly Gulf, leaders. The rift grew as more Arab states agreed or succumbed to pressure to join the U.S.-led coalition. Palestinian abandonment grew more severe.

In Israel, the threat of attack by Iraq grew. Rumors of Iraqi chemical or biological weapons fed the fears among Israelis, as gas masks were distributed and citizens were instructed to create sealed rooms in their homes to protect from chemicals. Palestinians living under Israeli occupation were largely denied gas masks, engendering fury across the occupied territories, to the degree that some Palestinians actually cheered the prospect of incoming scud missiles. The government agreed to a U.S. demand that Israel not retaliate, even to a direct Iraqi strike, in order to maintain Arab participation in the coalition, and in return agreed to protect Israel.

When fighting began, Iraq did indeed fire several dozen missiles against Israeli cities. None were armed with chemical or biological weapons, and none did major damage. Casualties included two Israelis killed in the attacks, along with some who died from stress-related heart attacks and from misuse of gas masks. Israel did not respond militarily to the Iraqi strikes.

The end of the war, with Iraq qualitatively defeated and weakened, left Israel in a very strong position. It used its elevated influence in Washington to shape the terms of the post-war Madrid conference—including exclusion of the United Nations, and severe restrictions on the nature of Palestinian participation. Those restrictions included rejection of a separate Palestinian delegation; Israel maintained the right to vet all Palestinian participants to insure that only Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza could negotiate for the Palestinians. Any Palestinians from East Jerusalem, anyone with official ties to the PLO, and anyone from the far-flung Palestinian diaspora were all excluded.

The major compromise the Palestinians made in 1988, when they declared an independent state and accepted a two-state solution, thus accepting a state on only 22 percent of their historic territory, was largely ignored after the Gulf War. The intifada had brought new credibility and political power to the Palestinians and the PLO; by the end of the Gulf crisis, most of that momentary power was lost.

### **What was the first "intifada" all about?**

In the twenty years after Israel first took over the West Bank and Gaza, a new generation, half the population, grew up knowing nothing but military occupation. Unlike their parents, many of whom still dreamed of returning to their homes inside Israel (a dream that would be reclaimed by the third generation of refugees and exiles), these teenagers and young



of war and replace it with a state of non-belligerency. Bush identified his goals as peace treaties, security, trade, economic relations, investment, “even tourism.” Significantly, he did not speak of justice, ending occupation, or Palestinian independence at goals to be fought for or protected in the context of the Madrid talks.

Bush’s plan called for five years of Palestinian “self-government,” in the third year of which negotiations would begin for a final resolution of the status of the occupied territories, very close to the Oslo formula that would later replace the Madrid process. He claimed that this “self-government” would “give the Palestinian people meaningful control of their own lives,” while taking into account Israeli security.” Bush appropriated Israel’s own formula, describing how Palestinians under “self-rule” would be allowed to control their own lives, but there was no change in maintaining Israel’s control of the land. Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev focused primarily on the international context for the peace conference, and described Middle East peace in words that evoked Dr. Martin Luther King—defining peace as “not merely the cessation of war, but of moving towards justice.” His country, however, would disappear from the map less than two months later, and his words had little relevance.

After the ceremonies in Madrid, the diplomats got down to work in bilateral talks based in Washington. A parallel set of multi-lateral talks on issues such as refugees, water, and economic development brought together much broader governmental participation, including Canada, Japan, the European Union, first in an opening conference in Moscow in January 1992, followed by separate meetings in scattered capitals.

The various sets of talks plodded along in fits and starts for the next 18 months or so. Little progress was made, and frustrations grew higher. The impasse involved two principal issues: Israel’s refusal to come to terms with its role as occupier, and to make any commitment to stop building the illegal settlements. As months passed, and Palestinian and Israeli diplomats returned to State Department conference rooms for round after round of fruitless diplomacy, a growing realization emerged that Madrid was failing. The PLO, faced with the simultaneous task of orchestrating the officially non-PLO diplomatic team in the Madrid process while trying to provide international grounding to the continuing intifada going on at home. Developments were getting dire, and it was in that period of Madrid’s stalemate that the secret back-channel Oslo talks began.

The urgency of the PLO may also have been rooted in the organization’s growing understanding of the U.S. role. Round 10 of the Madrid talks collapsed over the issue of Jerusalem. Prior to that round, some hope had lingered among at least some of the Palestinian diplomats that the Clinton administration would stake out a position rooted in its claimed commitment to human rights—rather than in its well-known close ties to Israel. When Secretary of State Warren Christopher not only accepted the legitimacy of Israel’s position (that occupied Arab Jerusalem be excluded from the interim Palestinian authority) but demanded that the Palestinians sign a “joint statement of principles” based on that position, the Palestinians realized they could not hope for an even-handed sponsor in Washington, and the talks collapsed. The loss of that hoped-for U.S.

## PART TWO

# The Other Players: The Role of the U.S., the UN, Arab States, and Europe

**Why is the Israel-Palestine conflict so important on the global stage? Why does the rest of the world care, and get so involved, in this conflict in such a small place?**

Global interest in Israel-Palestine reflects two different kinds of concerns: personal (including religious affiliation and national or ethnic bonds) and strategic (including military, diplomatic and other considerations). As the site of holy places of all three of the world’s main monotheistic religions, it is perhaps inevitable that passions will run high.

Strategically, in its earliest days Palestine was a crossroads of trade between three continents. Since 1967 Israel played an important role as a Cold War ally and sometimes surrogate of the U.S. Today Israel stands as one of perhaps the two or three closest U.S. allies, and for most nations around the world, maintaining good relations with Washington requires at least amicable ties to Israel.

Palestine today stands at the symbolic center of Arab consciousness, giving it a regional and indeed international significance far beyond its size. Palestine is also, since the independence of East Timor, one of the last remnants of a once far more common phenomenon: what the UN used to call “non-self-governing territories”. In other words, colonies occupied by another nation.

**What is the international response to the Israel-Palestine conflict? Is there international agreement?**

Since at least the mid-1970s, when the Palestine Liberation Organization was deemed the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and welcomed as an observer member of the United Nations, there has been a clear international consensus on how to deal with the seemingly endless conflict.

Security Council Resolution 242, passed after the 1967 war, is widely recognized as the basis for a permanent settlement. Outside of the U.S.,

however, the resolution is understood in a much different way than simply calling for an exchange of land for peace. The international consensus puts much greater emphasis than the U.S. does on the opening words of the resolution, which identifies “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war.” That is understood to mean that the territory Israel captured by war must be returned; that to keep it is “inadmissible.”

In terms of process, the international community has long recognized as inadequate the notion of bilateral talks under U.S. sponsorship, in which Israel and Palestine, with such enormous disparities of power, face each other as if on a level playing field. That they are forced to negotiate before a mediator which is itself the strategic, financial, diplomatic and military champion of the stronger of the two parties, only makes matters less legitimate. Instead, the UN has repeatedly called for convening an international peace conference, in which all the parties to the conflict, including Israel, the PLO, the Arab states and others would negotiate in concert under the auspices of the UN Security Council.

### **Why hasn't the U.S. been part of that consensus?**

The U.S. has, since 1967 or so, strongly opposed internationalizing the conflict. Washington maintained the view that multi-lateral talks would amount to other countries unfairly ganging up on Israel, and that the U.S. itself was the only outside power with a legitimate right to lead, or even participate in, negotiations. As a result, even diplomatic efforts with a patina of international legitimacy, such as the Madrid peace talks in 1991, were fundamentally reduced to separate and unequal bilateral talks between, in that case, Israel and each Arab party. (The Israeli-Palestinian talks in Madrid, in fact, did not even constitute an independent track, but rather were orchestrated as a sub-set of the Israeli-Jordanian talks.)

### **Why is the U.S. the central player in the Middle East?**

The main reason is power. By the time Israel was created, with the end of the British Mandate over Palestine, World War II was just over and the European powers, victors and losers alike, lay decimated by war. Of all the major powers, only the U.S. survived the War intact and with economic and military power on the rise.

The U.S. spent the Cold War years locked in contention with the Soviet Union, as much as anywhere else vying for influence in the strategic Middle East. With the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the U.S. victory in the Gulf War that profoundly altered the Middle East in favor of even greater U.S. influence, Washington's now-unchallenged super-power status only expanded. Today the U.S. remains the controlling authority in shaping the political map of the region.

The combination of the U.S.-Israeli “special relationship” and the vast superiority of Israel's power in the region further consolidates the U.S. centrality. As long as Israel remains the strongest military force in the region, with the fifth most powerful nuclear arsenal in the world and one of the most powerful conventional militaries anywhere, other countries in the region and

## **PART FOUR**

# **Looking Backwards (1900–1991)**

### **What was the Madrid peace conference in 1991?**

When the Gulf War ended in 1991 with the defeat of Iraq and the U.S. triumphant and unchallenged across the Middle East, Washington turned towards redrawing the political map of the region. The goal reflected a continuation of the U.S. rationale for the war itself—Iraq's illegal invasion of Kuwait had provided a convenient pretext for the U.S. to lead the world to war to prove it remained a superpower even as the Cold War ended. Now it would prove it could orchestrate a regional peace the same way. And it would do so at a moment of terrible division in the Arab world, division rooted in Iraq's invasion of a fellow Arab country. Palestinian leaders had opposed the U.S. war build-up, as did most of the Arab street, and supported earlier attempts to bring about a joint Arab solution, but together with Jordan, they refrained from supporting the US war effort; one result was the erosion of long-standing Arab support for Palestinian national rights, the expulsion of thousands of Palestinians from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, the significant weakening of the Palestinian diplomatic position.

The Madrid peace conference was ostensibly under joint U.S.-Soviet invitation, but with the Soviet Union about to collapse, there was no question that Washington was in sole charge. Madrid was designed to look like the long-sought international peace conference—invitations were sent to the European Union, Japan, many Arab countries and more—but the glittering international gala provided only the ceremonial opening to the actual negotiations. And those were—as Israel had long demanded—separate bilateral talks between Israel and each of its Arab interlocutors, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

It was only within the confines of the Israel-Jordan talks that the Palestinians were even included; they were denied the right to participate as a separate delegation, but only as a sub-set of the Jordanian team. Israel also had won U.S. agreement accepting Israel's severe restrictions on who could negotiate on behalf of the Palestinians.

Madrid was very much an American initiative. President George Bush Senior, opening the conference, said its aim was to achieve a “just, lasting, and comprehensive peace” in the Middle East, not simply to end the state



return and opened negotiations on how to implement that right. It would have created security guarantees for both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, perhaps including international assistance in monitoring borders. As called for in the Saudi/Arab League peace proposal, normalization of relations between Israel and all the Arab countries would follow the end of Israel's occupation.

Then, the hard work of rebuilding a shattered economy and shattered society in Palestine, and rebuilding shattered lives in both Palestine and Israel, could begin.

around the world will tend to limit their diplomatic imagination to what they think Israel will accept. That means acquiescence to continued U.S. control.

### **What explains the U.S.-Israeli "special relationship"?**

When Israel was first created, its leaders chose to maintain the clear Euro-American, rather than Middle Eastern, orientation that had characterized the Zionist movement even before the state was founded. With statehood, was inevitable that Israel would turn for help and support to the leading western power, the post-World War II United States.

U.S. support for Israel was strong, but remained diplomatically and financially normal until the time of the '67 War. Until that time Israel's main arms supplier was France, not the U.S. But when Israel demonstrated the extraordinary military prowess that destroyed three Arab armies and occupied all or parts of four countries. Washington quickly recognized Israel's potential as a valuable Cold War ally, and the friendly alliance segued into the all-embracing "special relationship" and a strategic alliance that continues today.

Economic assistance, military aid and diplomatic protection all soared. Within U.S. society, support for Israel grew exponentially as existing pro-Israeli organizations (mostly but not entirely based in the U.S. Jewish community) dramatically increased their influence in popular culture, in education, in the media, and among policymakers. Members of Congress who made statements in support of Palestinian rights or voted even-handedly on legislation concerning the Middle East have been regularly punished by the pro-Israel lobby. Congressman Paul Findley and Senator Charles Percy lost their seats during the 1980s, while Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney and Congressman Hilliard lost in the 2002 primaries after an AIPAC-funded campaign was launched on behalf of their challengers.

### **Is the U.S. an "honest broker" in the conflict?**

The U.S. calls itself an honest broker, but that is correct only in a very particular context. The parallel is not that of a baseball umpire, independent and impartial, but rather that of a real estate agent who deals with both parties—honestly—but whom it is known represents the interests of one side because her own economic (or in this case strategic) interests depend on it.

Perhaps more dangerously, the U.S. position has never placed international law and UN resolutions at its center. If it did, the necessity of a complete end to Israel's occupation would be understood as the starting point of any kind of future peace for Israel as well as for the Palestinians.

### **How does the U.S. support Israel?**

U.S. support for Israel emerges in several ways: financial, military and diplomatic. While most Americans believe that U.S. foreign aid goes to the poorest people in the poorest countries, Israel (wealthier than a number of European Union member countries) receives 25 percent of the entire U.S. foreign aid budget. Since 1976 Israel has been the highest recipient of U.S.

foreign aid in the world. The congressional aid comes to about \$1.8 billion a year in military aid and \$1.2 billion in economic aid, plus another \$1 billion or so in miscellaneous grants, mostly in military supplies, from various U.S. agencies. Tax-exempt contributions destined to Israel bring up the total to over \$5 billion annually.

Israel is the only country allowed to spend part of its military aid funds (25 percent) on its own domestic arms industry; all other recipients of U.S. military aid are required to use it to purchase U.S.-manufactured weapons. This has helped Israel consolidate its own arms exporting sector, some parts of which actually compete for export customers with U.S. arms manufacturers. More directly, Israel has access to the most advanced weapons systems in the U.S. arsenal, for purchase with U.S. taxpayer assistance. The U.S. defends Israel's refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and has endorsed the principle of "strategic ambiguity" in which Israel refuses to officially acknowledge its widely known and documented nuclear capacity, and its arsenal of over 200 high-density nuclear bombs in the Dimona nuclear facility remains un-inspected.

During the Cold War the U.S. relied on Israel's military power as an extension of its own, with Israeli arms sales, military training and backing of pro-U.S. governments and pro-U.S. anti-government guerrillas in countries from Mozambique and Angola to El Salvador, Chile and Nicaragua. That "cat's paw" relationship consolidated the U.S.-Israeli military ties that continue today. Most of the weapons Israel uses in the occupied territories, including Apache helicopter gunships, F-16 fighter bombers, wire-guided missiles, armored Caterpillar bulldozers used to demolish Palestinian houses, and others are all made in the U.S., and purchased from U.S. manufacturers with U.S. military aid funds. Some of the weapons, such as the Merkava tanks, are joint products of Israel's domestic arms industry and U.S. manufacturing technology.

Diplomatically, the U.S. alone protects Israel in the United Nations and other international arenas from being held accountable for its violations of international law. After 1967, U.S. patterns of opposing UN resolutions critical of Israel become more pronounced. Most of the U.S. vetoes cast in the Security Council in the 1980s and 90s, and almost all of those cast since the end of the Cold War, have been to protect Israel.

### **Why was the Bush administration so much less involved than the Clinton administration in Israel-Palestine diplomacy?**

In the first months of its term, prior to September 11th, the Bush administration adopted a policy of keeping up the aid to and diplomatic protection of Israel, but keeping their heads down and their hands off on peace talks. It wasn't terribly surprising—this was an administration whose members' economic and political power was thoroughly enmeshed in the oil industry, with a long history of relations with oil-rich Arab states. The oil and stability legs of the Middle East policy triplets were primary, but they were outweighed by the rise of the neo-conservatives and Christian fundamentalists whose support for Israel became unequivocal. Moreover, the Arab oil factor ceased to give leverage to Arab governments in the aftermath of September 11.

Bill Clinton's hasty departure for the G-8 summit in Okinawa and his hurried return. The official post-summit statement issued jointly by the Palestinian, Israeli and American sides called the talks "unprecedented in both scope and detail." But in the end they failed anyway.

### **Didn't Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak make the most generous offer in history to the Palestinians? Why did they reject it?**

President Clinton, understanding the difficulties and potential pitfalls that lay ahead, had promised both parties that he would not blame either side if the talks collapsed. But when the talks broke down he pointed his finger squarely at Yāsir Arafāt and the Palestinians. Perhaps the most widely repeated claim after Camp David was that of Barak's "generous offer" to the Palestinians. It was, we were told over and over again, the most generous offer any Israeli official had ever made.

That statement, technically, is absolutely true. It is also, however, absolutely irrelevant. The standard against which any serious diplomatic offer made by a country illegally occupying another must be viewed, is not how well it compares to earlier offers made by that same illegal occupying power. It must be judged against the requirements of international law. And from that standard, Barak's offer was far from generous. The "generous offer" was a myth.

What was more important than how generous it was compared to earlier Israeli offers, was the simple fact that, according to Clinton negotiator Robert Malley, it was simply not true that "Israel's offer met most if not all of the Palestinians' legitimate aspirations." That was the reason Palestinians rejected the offer. One can certainly question the wisdom of a diplomatic strategy that did not provide an immediate counter-proposal to an unacceptable offer. But there should be little difficulty in understanding why Palestinian negotiators would reject an offer based on a set of disconnected pieces of territory amounting to only 80 percent of the remaining 22 percent of historic Palestine; a network of roads, bridges and tunnels accessible only to Israeli settlers and permanently guarded by Israeli soldiers; permanent loss of water resources; no shared sovereignty in Jerusalem; the right of return for refugees not even up for discussion; and with 80 percent of the illegal settlers to remain in place.

### **What would a comprehensive peace have looked like at Camp David?**

A comprehensive peace would have called for an end to Israeli occupation—all the occupation, withdrawing Israeli troops from all of the West Bank and Gaza, returning Israel's borders to those of June 4, 1967. It would have called for an independent Palestinian state in the entire West Bank and Gaza Strip, with the Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem and the entire city of Jerusalem open between the two countries. It would have announced the closure of all settlements as Israeli military enclaves, with settlers given the option of moving back to Israel with compensation, or remaining in their settlement towns as ordinary citizens of the new Palestinian state. It would have acknowledged the Palestinian right of



in something approaching 80 percent of the West Bank plus Gaza. The capital would not be in Jerusalem, although some limited municipal authority in Palestinian neighborhoods might be granted. The 20 percent of the West Bank that Israel would keep would be made up of the settlements, military bases, and, crucially, the bypass roads that effectively divide the West Bank into separate regions. It was as if someone's house had been occupied against their will for many years, and they were suddenly told that they could have all the rooms back, but the occupier was going to keep control of the hallways between the rooms. How much of a home would that be?

Israel proposed maintaining control of two major east-west highways, which would cut the West Bank into three completely separate, non-contiguous areas. Key water sources, underground aquifers, would remain under Israeli control, as would external borders and air space. About 20 percent of the West Bank settlers, primarily from small isolated settlements, would be resettled inside Israel; the other 80 percent, including the large settlement blocs, would remain under Israeli jurisdiction and under the protection of the Israeli army; the Palestinian state would have no authority over the Jewish settlers.

#### **What happened at Camp David? Why did it fail?**

The Camp David summit reflected an almost desperate effort by President Clinton to salvage the failing Oslo peace process before the end of his second term. Although the origins of Oslo were not in U.S. diplomatic effort, Washington had taken on sponsorship of the peace process, and the September 1993 photo opportunity remained the high point of Clinton's presidency. There is little question but that the president was eager for a new photo-op to burnish his scandal-tarnished place in history. Ehud Barak as well, the Israeli prime minister whose lackluster term was coming to an end, persuaded Clinton to convene the ill-prepared summit.

Camp David reflected the failure of Oslo's seven year-long "peace process." Palestinian lives had deteriorated, unemployment was up, incomes were down, and the euphoria that had greeted the White House handshake seven years earlier had turned into bitter resentment and rising anger. Until Camp David, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators had never even opened talks on the difficult final status issues. Clinton's view was that by leapfrogging over the "interim" issues and going straight to the fundamentals—state and borders, settlements, Jerusalem and refugees—it might be possible to rescue the process and, in the process, his legacy.

But that would have been possible only if the U.S. was prepared to demand serious concessions from Israel, its longstanding ally and the holder of all the cards. But instead the Clinton administration acted as if the talks were between two equal partners, who bore equal power and responsibility to make compromises and concessions instead of an occupying power and an occupied population. In fact, the problem at Camp David was precisely the problem that the disparity of power that had long characterized Israeli-Palestinian negotiations remained unchallenged; President Clinton did nothing to try to balance the thoroughly lop-sided playing field. The talks persisted for two weeks, through sleepless nights and intensive days, through

Certainly the existing close U.S. ties to Israel were strengthened. But despite the continuity of \$5 billion or so in military and economic aid, and a continued threat and/or use of UN vetoes and walk-outs to protect Israel in the United Nations, the Bush policy became known as "disengagement." Europe, Arab states and others around the world began crying for "greater engagement," as if Washington's billions in aid, the protective vetoes, the diplomatic privileging of Israel did not constitute intimate engagement. It was just a kind of engagement that did not include an active commitment to serious peace efforts. U.S. diplomatic passivity, however, did not obscure the green light given to Sharon by the Bush administration to have a free hand against the civilian population of the occupied territories.

#### **What is the Bush administration Middle East policy all about?**

Immediately after the September 11, 2001 World Trade Center attacks, the Bush administration appeared to distance itself from Israel. The need to maintain Arab and Islamic government support in Bush's new "anti-terrorism war" coalition trumped the usual warm embrace of Israel, although U.S. economic and strategic backing of Israel remained quietly unchanged. Fearing even greater distancing, Israeli spokespeople launched a near-frenzied campaign of linkage, claiming unparalleled unity with Americans as common victims of terrorism and common Arab/Islamic enemies. It didn't work very well beyond the punditocracy, though, and in November, both Secretary of State Colin Powell and President Bush himself, at the UN General Assembly, paid significant attention to words the Palestinians and—more strategically—Arab governments and their restive populations, wanted to hear. Bush's call for a "state of Palestine" and Powell's "the occupation must end" appeared to herald a new, maybe even even-handed approach of U.S. diplomacy.

But that even-handed approach was not to last. As maintaining the coalition in Afghanistan became less important (when major cities under Taliban rule were already falling), the tactical pendulum swung back, and Washington returned to a more public embrace of Israel and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. This took the form of an announced effort to "re-engage" in the "peace process." The first messenger was General Anthony Zinni, whose two brief visits at the end of 2001 ended in failure (once after a suicide bombing, once following the discovery of the shipload of arms en route to Palestine ostensibly from Iran). For a while the administration appeared unconcerned with the escalating violence, appearing to believe against all evidence that Palestine could burn, the supply of desperate young suicide bombers heading into Israel would appear unending, and the crisis would somehow stay contained.

But then by February 2002 or so Iraq reemerged as a central feature of U.S. regional efforts. The stakes were going up, a new round of regional shuttling was required to lay out the requirements and lay down the law regarding support for a U.S. attack on Iraq to Washington's Arab allies. General Zinni wasn't quite high enough in the administration hierarchy for this one, so into the breach stepped Vice-President Dick Cheney, an experienced Middle East hand from his years as secretary of

defense in the Bush Senior administration. (Actually, Cheney's oil-driven loyalties were clear long before: as a member of the House of Representatives, Cheney supported the 1981 sale of AWACS planes to Saudi Arabia, despite Israeli opposition, and in 1979 he voted against the windfall profits tax on oil revenues.)

In the wake of September 11, with dependent and already compliant Arab regimes virtually falling over each other to climb on board the Bush anti-terror train, the administration seemed to anticipate Cheney's job would be a push-over. Sure there might be some unease in the palaces over how to deal with Arab populations already raging over the rapidly deteriorating crisis in the West Bank, but it was assumed that however much they twitched and weasled, Washington's Arab allies would stand reluctantly with Washington.

As it turned out, it wasn't quite so easy. The Israel-Palestine conflict stood in the way. While there was little doubt that at the end of the day the Arab kings, emirs, princes and presidents would indeed do as their patron ordered, public opinion throughout the Arab world had hardened not only against Israel and its occupation, but against its global sponsor, the United States. Arab governments, already facing severe crises of legitimacy, might do as they were told, but they would pay a very high price domestically for their alliance with Washington. Israel's escalation in the occupied territories provided what seemed to provide an easy dodge for the Arab royals: "how can you even talk to us about supporting an invasion or overthrow campaign against Iraq when Palestine is burning and you are doing nothing?"

So some time before Cheney's Air Force Two took off, someone in Washington realized what was about to happen, so General Zinni was sent back to the region. His mandate for Israel-Palestine had not changed, and there was virtually no chance he would "succeed," however that elusive word was defined, but that was okay. His real goal had far more to do with developments in Arab capitals than it did in Tel Aviv and Ramallah where he began a shadow shuttle. Zinni was Cheney's political cover. "What do you mean we're doing nothing for the Israel-Palestine crisis—we've sent General Zinni!" was the vice-president's new mantra.

Washington's diplomatic "re-engagement" was largely designed with war in Iraq, not peace in Israel-Palestine, in mind. As it turned out, that plan didn't work either; while Arab dependents were simply not willing to concede prematurely and risk further destabilization or even potential threats to their regimes, Cheney's trip fizzled, and the Bush spin operation focused on convincing an only mildly skeptical audience inside and outside Washington that the vice-president's trip was never intended to consolidate support for an attack on Iraq.

Then it was Secretary of State Powell's turn. Following Cheney's failed trip the Bush administration called a brief time-out in the new game of engagement. The press focused largely on the messenger. Was General Zinni simply too far down in the hierarchy to have the requisite clout with Sharon and/or Arafat? Would Bush send General Powell, ratcheting up the four-star factor? But what was largely left out of the debate was the reality that it was not the messenger, but the mandate that would determine the

responsibility for the refugee crisis, and recognizes the internationally recognized right of return as a right.

#### **What happened to settlements and settlers during the years of the Oslo process?**

Construction of new settlements and expansion of existing settlements were already increasing at the time the Oslo process began in 1993. The settler population was growing by about 10 percent a year, even during the Labor party government of the late Yitzhak Rabin. In fact, the years that Rabin's government was in power saw the largest expansion of the settlements since they began in 1968.

In 1998 Israel began construction on a new settlement named Har Homa, on a West Bank hillside known as Jabal Abu-ghoneim lying between Jerusalem and Beit Sahour. It caused enormous opposition, because it was the final link in a ring of settlements surrounding East Jerusalem, that together served to cut off access from Arab Jerusalem to the West Bank. It led to new UN debates about the settlements as a violation of the Geneva Conventions. But the protests led nowhere, building continued, and by mid-2002 Israeli Jewish residents were filling the gleaming white stone, ultra-modern settlement apartments.

From the beginning of Oslo until 2002, the settler population almost doubled. While the U.S.-backed Mitchell Plan of 2001 called for a freeze in settlement construction as a "confidence-building measure" by Israel, the expansion continued. Currently the Israeli settler population in the occupied territories has topped 400,000—about 200,000 in the West Bank, 200,000 in Arab East Jerusalem, and about 6,000 in the Gaza Strip. In spring 2002, the Israeli Peace Now organization documented 34 new settlements that had been established during the Sharon government's term.

The continued existence, and expansion, of the settlements, remains an enormous obstacle in reaching Israeli-Palestinian peace. They violate the Geneva Conventions, which specifically prohibit the transfer of anyone from the occupying country to the occupied territory. Further, the settlements, and the settlers-only or "bypass" roads that connect them and link them to cities inside Israel, divide the territories into separate cantons surrounded by Israeli troops, and prevent the creation of a contiguous Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. These roads, most built during the Oslo period, have been constructed on confiscated Palestinian land, and funded with United States tax money.

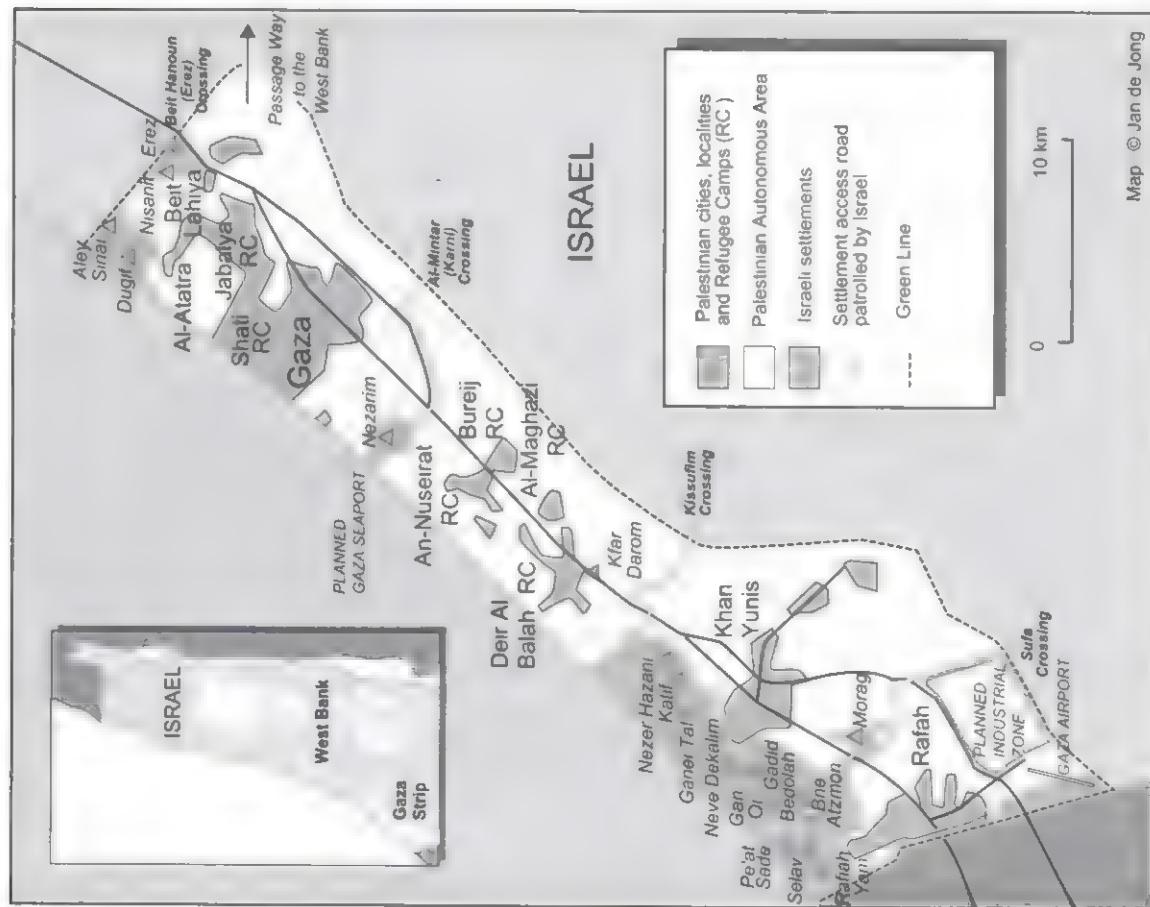
#### **What would a Palestinian "state" as determined by Oslo/Camp David have looked like?**

In October 1995, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin declared Israel would not return to the 1967 borders as required under international law. He said Jerusalem would remain unified and under exclusive Israeli sovereignty, and that most of the settlements would remain. Further, he described the Palestinian "entity" to be created as something that would be "less than a state."

What Israel proposed at Camp David in August 2000 (the first occasion when final status issues were directly negotiated), was a Palestinian "state"



## The Gaza Strip, 2000



accept compensation and citizenship in their place of refuge or in third countries. Some, most likely among the most impoverished and disempowered Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon, may indeed choose to return to their homes in Israel. But discussion of how to implement this right of return (in a way that creates the least, rather than the greatest, disruption to Israeli society) cannot begin until Israel acknowledges its

success or failure of the mission. Zinni failed not because he wasn't of high enough rank, but because he had no mandate to seriously dictate terms to Israel. As it turned out, neither did Powell. Two suicide bombings in late March, killing dozens of Israeli civilians inside Israel, raised the stakes; Washington clearly was going to respond.

But before any new U.S. decision was announced, March 29th brought the unprecedented Israeli military offensive across the West Bank, with mostly U.S.-provided Israeli tanks, helicopter gunships, armored bulldozers and F-16s punching into Ramallah, Bethlehem, Nablus, Jenin, Tulkarem and tiny villages in between. It looked, on the Israeli side at least, like what UN Secretary General Kofi Annan called "a conventional war," even though it was the mighty Israeli army operating in civilian areas.

At that point Bush himself jumped into the fray, in a major speech in the White House Rose Garden on April 4th. He announced he would send Powell to the region, and outlined a vision, if a bit skimpy and more than a bit blurry, of what a peaceful settlement might look like. "The outlines of a just settlement are clear: two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side, in peace and security."

For long-term thinking, the words were all there: Israel must stop settlement activity, and "the occupation must end through withdrawal to secure and recognized boundaries..." Four days later Bush said he told Sharon, "I expect there to be withdrawal without delay." The words were strong. The key action, though, was limited to sending Powell back to the region. There would be no real pressure on Israel: no cut in the billions in military aid, no brake on the pipeline of military equipment being used against civilians, no reversal of the Israel-backing veto in the Security Council preventing the deployment of international protection or even observer forces. Bush talked the talk of serious pressure, but he refused to walk the walk.

The real limits of Bush's intentions were made clear in the timetable. Powell would go to the region, but he would take his long sweet time getting there. Arriving first in Morocco the young king welcomed Powell with the question "why are you here, why aren't you in Jerusalem?"

Powell's languid pace, from Morocco to Madrid, to Jordan, to Egypt, before arriving almost a week later in Jerusalem provided what amounted to a week-long green light for Sharon's assault on the cities, villages and especially refugee camps of the West Bank. Yet when Powell returned, President Bush welcomed him home with the claim that U.S. goals had been met, that the trip was a success, that all was well with the world. It was an Alice in Wonderland moment, with Bush announcing straight-faced that "I do believe Ariel Sharon is a man of peace."

Israel's assault gradually wound down in some of the West Bank refugee camps, even as tensions mounted around Bethlehem's besieged Church of the Nativity and Arafat's tank-encircled presidential compound in Ramallah. But the goal of the Bush administration, the aim of the Zinni, Cheney, Powell shuttles as well as those of their underlings who took over when the big men went home, had failed. The objective of stabilizing the region sufficiently that Arab regimes could safely endorse a U.S. military strike against Iraq without fearing domestic upheaval, had not been reached.

And at home, the Bush administration faced its first serious foreign policy challenge from the right. Christian fundamentalists and other opponents of the Republican Party's hard right edge moved into an even tighter embrace of Ariel Sharon's government, rejecting even Bush's rhetorical pretense of concern for Palestinian rights. Paul Wolfowitz, ardent pro-Israeli hawk and Bush's deputy chief of the Pentagon, was booed by tens of thousands of pro-Israeli demonstrators when he had the audacity to mention as a brief side-light that Palestinian children might be suffering too. The danger of a serious split within the Republican Party, with its right-wing backing Israel, while the Bush-oriented "moderates" cling to their traditional ties to big oil, the Arab regimes, military assault on Iraq, loomed as a Texas-sized nightmare for the president.

By mid-summer, Iraq war fever was epidemic in Washington. Competing battle plans for diverse military operations were leaked by competing administration factions to competing newspapers. Powerful Republicans in Congress, the pages of the New York Times, the State Department, former Republican officials, even the Joint Chiefs of Staff, rejected the increasingly belligerent war cries of the Pentagon's civilian leadership. But as the debate wore on, supplanting most other international stories on the front pages and top of the news shows, the crisis in Israel-Palestine ground on with no end in sight. There was no U.S. effort to craft new peace talks aimed at making real the president's rhetorical commitment to ending the occupation and creating an independent Palestinian state.

**Where does U.S. aid to Israel fit in the broader scheme of U.S. foreign aid? Does the U.S. provide aid to the PA also?**

The U.S. sends about \$4 billion to Israel in military and economic aid every year, in addition to tax-exempt contributions. About \$3 billion is mandated directly from Congress (the rest comes in smaller increments from specific U.S. agencies) and amounts to about one-quarter of the entire U.S. aid budget. U.S. laws require that aid to Israel remain at least above Israel's international debt, thus insuring that U.S. tax funds act as a guarantee of all Israeli loans. Israel is among only a tiny number of countries whose U.S. aid allotments have remained steady even in recent years of economic slump.

Other U.S. laws insure specific aid commitments to Israel as a result of the first Camp David process between Israel and Egypt. Under those arrangements, Egypt, with nearly 70 million people and a per capita annual income of just over \$3000, receives only about two-thirds of the funds allocated to Israel.

In 2001 Israel itself requested that the apportionment of its U.S. aid be shifted. Instead of the current balance of about \$1.8 billion in military aid and \$1.2 billion in economic assistance, the new plan called for a reduction by about 10 percent of the economic aid, to be matched by parallel increases in military aid. The goal would be, after ten years, to have Israel's entire aid allocation in the form of military assistance.

Since the creation of the Palestinian Authority, the U.S. has provided some economic aid to the Palestinians. But unlike European and Japanese

they would eventually come home because it is a longstanding tenet of international law that war-time refugees have the right to return home.

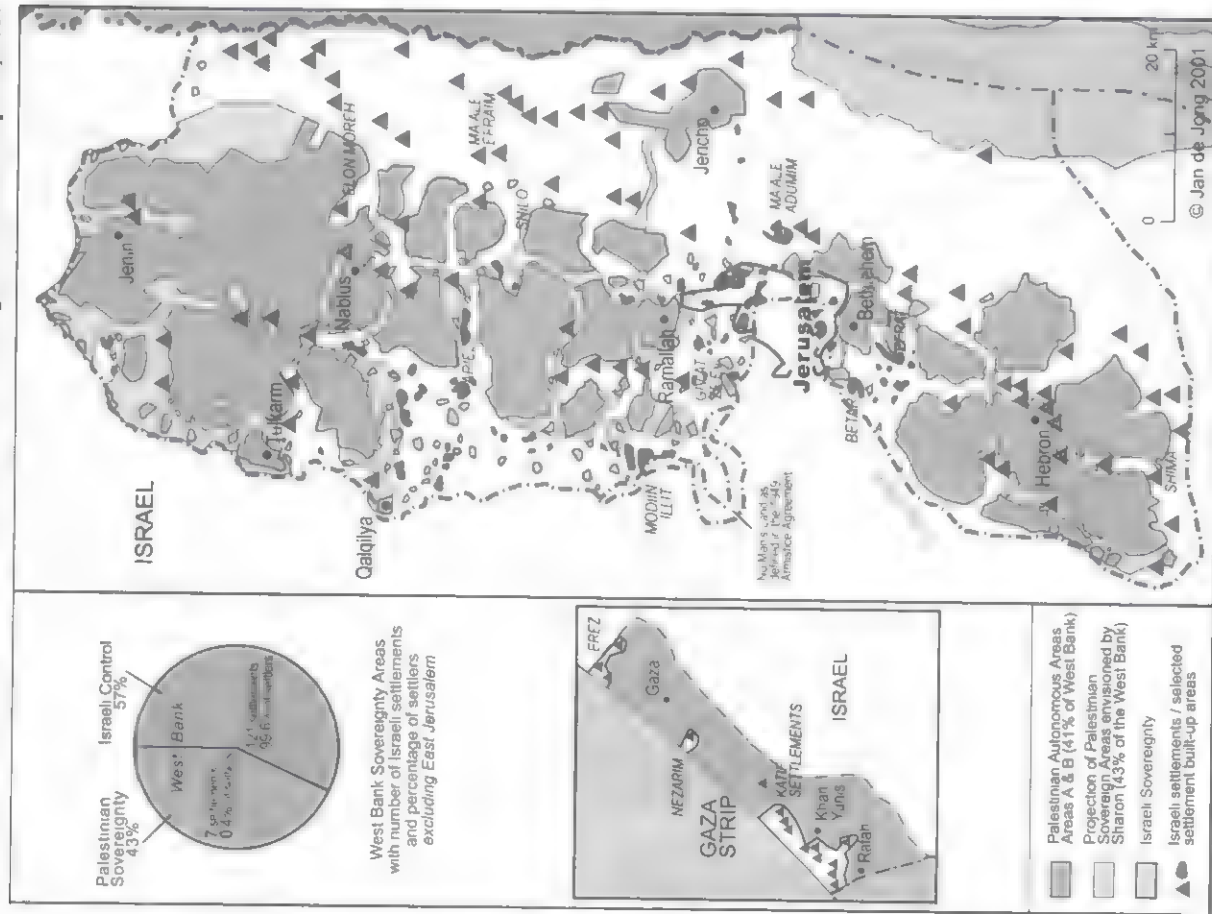
In the fall of 1948, the United Nations recognized the particular plight of the Palestinian refugees. In response, the world body did two things. It created UNRWA to provide basic food, medicine, housing and education to the desperate and impoverished refugees. And second, it passed resolution 194, which went beyond customary international law that protects all refugees, to provide special protection for the Palestinians. The resolution reaffirmed that Palestinian "refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return." The UN even made Israel's own entry to the world body contingent on Israeli acceptance of resolution 194.

Many of the 1948 refugees fled from their homes in what had just become Israel to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, where large portions of the populations still live in the refugee camps established at that time. When the West Bank and Gaza were occupied in 1967, many of those refugees fled the fighting again, and were made refugees for a second time, finding homes in already overcrowded refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. There was discussion at the Camp David summit about allowing some of the 1967 refugees to return to their homes in a future Palestinian state, but there was no resolution. (Israel would remain in control of Palestine's borders, determining who would or would not be allowed to enter the ostensibly "independent" country.)

The 1948 refugees and their descendants, now numbering about 5 million world-wide, have the right under international law to return to their homes inside what is now Israel. But despite international law and the specific requirements of Resolution 194, Israel has never allowed Palestinian refugees to return to their homes. Israel maintains that allowing the Palestinian refugees to return would change its demographic balance, more than doubling Israel's current 19 percent Palestinian population. Israelis sometimes use the expression "demographic bomb" to describe the effect of large-scale immigration of Palestinians to Israel. However, international law does not allow a country to violate UN resolutions and international principles in order to protect its ethnic or religious composition. The parallel would be if Rwanda's new Tutsi-dominated government, after the 1994 genocide, announced that they would not allow the overwhelmingly Hutu refugees to return home, because it would disrupt the ethnic balance in their country. The United Nations and the world, appropriately, would have made very clear that such a prohibition was unacceptable. Palestinian refugees, despite the passage of time, have the same rights as their Rwandan counterparts.

Most Palestinians recognize that while rights themselves are absolute, implementation of rights is always negotiable. It is likely that once their right to return has been recognized, a certain segment of Palestinian refugees will choose options other than permanent return to their mostly-demolished villages. But the key factor will be the ability of Palestinians to choose for themselves what to do. Some may choose to go home, some may wish to go only for short visits, some may wish to accept compensation and build new lives in a new Palestinian state, many may choose to





increasingly large number of Israeli academics, the “new historians,” carefully researched and completely debunked that myth. There were no such radio broadcasts. Some of the civilians fled because they were attacked by the Haganah, Palmach and Irgun militias. Others were afraid and believed

aid to the Palestinian Authority, or U.S. aid to Israel, U.S. financial support for Palestinians is provided only to non-governmental organizations working in the occupied territories—none goes directly to the PA. While the PA, like so many fully sovereign governments that the U.S. supports, certainly has serious problems of corruption, bypassing it only insures the PA’s continued weakness and inability to even begin to function as a government.

**Didn’t the U.S. support creation of the Palestinian Authority? Why did the U.S. treat it differently than the PLO, which Washington usually tried to undermine or sideline?**

The Palestinian Authority was a product of the Oslo process, which began with the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles on the White House lawn in September 1993. While Oslo grew out of a secret diplomatic track initiated by Norway, the U.S. quickly took over as the main sponsor, and acted as overseer of the process and, tacitly, patron of the Palestinian Authority itself.

The U.S. saw the PA as a useful tool for accomplishing a key U.S. goal: stability and normalization in the occupied Palestinian territories. The PA’s authority was limited politically and geographically, and derivative ultimately of Israeli power. Israel viewed the PA largely as an agency that would take responsibility for organizing social and economic life in the Palestinian territories, including schools, health, welfare, etc., thus alleviating Israel’s obligation under the Geneva Convention to take care of the lives of the occupied population. Later, when Palestinian resistance to the occupation escalated, and especially with the emergence of suicide bombing attacks inside Israel, both Israel and the U.S. began to view the PA as a security agency—not to protect the lives and safety of Palestinians living under occupation, but to prevent any attacks on Israel. It was as if the Palestinian Authority was to serve as a surrogate for Israel’s own power—assigned the job of keeping Palestinians under control.

Unlike the PA, the PLO’s history was that of a nationalist movement fighting against an occupying power. Its means of fighting, both military and diplomatic, were similar to those of many other liberation movements, particularly during the anti-colonial wars of the 1960s and 70s. Yet Washington, as was true in so many other cases of liberation movements fighting against U.S. allies, identified the PLO as a “terrorist” organization, the same brush that tarred the African National Congress and its leader, Nelson Mandela, until well into the 1990s. As a result, despite United Nations and widespread international recognition of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, the U.S. refused to recognize or negotiate with the organization. Instead, the U.S. backed Israeli efforts to anoint various Palestinian leaders and notables as the “acceptable” Palestinians, and U.S.-led diplomatic efforts failed.

**Who else should be at the center of Middle East diplomacy?**

The United Nations should be the nucleus of a new diplomatic process. Because the UN created the State of Israel, because Israel’s occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem violates numerous UN resolu-

parties themselves. (Emphasis added.) The sad irony, of course, was that under the terms of Oslo those were the precise questions not under negotiation, because they were designated "final status" issues that would not come up for five or seven years.

That pattern continued. In October 2000, when 14 out of 15 members of the UN Security Council voted to condemn Israel's excessive force against civilians, it was the U.S. alone that abstained. Then-U.S. Ambassador Richard Holbrooke threatened to veto any further resolution.

At the time of Israel's reoccupation of Jenin in March, 2002, the Security Council was able to convince U.S. diplomats to accept a resolution calling for a United Nations investigation of the catastrophic crisis that had laid waste the city and killed 52 Palestinians and 23 Israeli soldiers. Israel initially agreed, but when Israel withdrew its approval for the fact-finding team, the U.S. backed their rejection and refused to allow the Council or the secretary-general to enforce the resolution. The fact-finding team was disbanded. The General Assembly, however, responded to the developments by reconvening in Emergency Session to pass its own resolution calling for the secretary-general to prepare a report based on other sources, primarily international human rights organizations.

In July 2002, at the height of Israel's reoccupation of Palestinian cities, the new U.S. Ambassador John Negroponte told a closed Security Council meeting that a proposed resolution condemning Israel was unhelpful and that the US would oppose it if it came to a vote. But he then went much further, telling the Council that in the future the U.S. would only consider Middle East resolutions that explicitly condemned Palestinian terrorism with explicit denunciations of several named Palestinian organizations. There was no such demand that all future resolutions equally condemn Israeli military or settler violence.

But the General Assembly's response to the Council's deadlock raises the possibility of a broader role for the UN's most democratic component. Under longstanding UN precedent, if the Council (which is the most powerful, but the least democratic part of the UN because of the veto held by the five permanent members) is deemed deadlocked, the General Assembly may take up issues that would ordinarily be limited to Council jurisdiction. That may make possible Assembly initiatives on issues such as international protection for Palestinians living under occupation (something repeatedly vetoed by the U.S.), or ultimately for an entirely new diplomatic process.

### **Why is Israel isolated from Arab countries in the region and in the UN and other international forums?**

Some of Israel's isolation reflects antagonism from neighboring countries, and some of it stems from Israel's own orientation and self-definition in the world. At the time the State of Israel was created, there was already wide-spread antagonism among Palestinians and in surrounding Arab countries towards the large and rapid influx of European Jews. While European Jewish settlement had gone on since the 1880s, the numbers vastly increased in the 1930s and '40s, as Jews escaping the Holocaust, and

sessions, those talks had stalled again in the spring of 1993, this time over the status of Jerusalem, and it was becoming clear they weren't going anywhere. Madrid's failure increased interest among the highest level officials on both sides in the still-secret talks underway in Oslo.

Those talks, initially involving Israeli academics and mid-level Palestinian officials brought together by Norway's foreign minister, had gone much further than the Madrid talks. They culminated in September 1993 with announcement that letters of mutual recognition and a Declaration of Principles had been agreed to. The U.S. quickly moved in to take over sponsorship of the process, and the White House signing ceremony finalized the agreement.

Oslo's DOP separated the various issues that divided Israelis and Palestinians into two types: easy and hard. The theory was that the "easy" issues—such things as release of prisoners, economic cooperation, construction of Palestinian sea and airports, security considerations, etc.—would be dealt with first, during a five-year interim period. Discussion of the hard "final status" issues—including borders of a Palestinian state, settlements, Jerusalem and refugees—would not even begin until the third year, and their resolution would be delayed till the end of the interim period (which was eventually extended from five to seven years).

### **Why didn't the Oslo process work?**

The problem was, the supposedly "easy" interim issues proved to be too difficult, and most of them never were resolved. As a result, no one ever even got around to discussing the final status questions. And no one—meaning the U.S., which remained the sponsor of the diplomatic process—was prepared to weigh in on the side of the Palestinians in the hope of balancing the extraordinary disparity of power that characterized relations between the two sides.

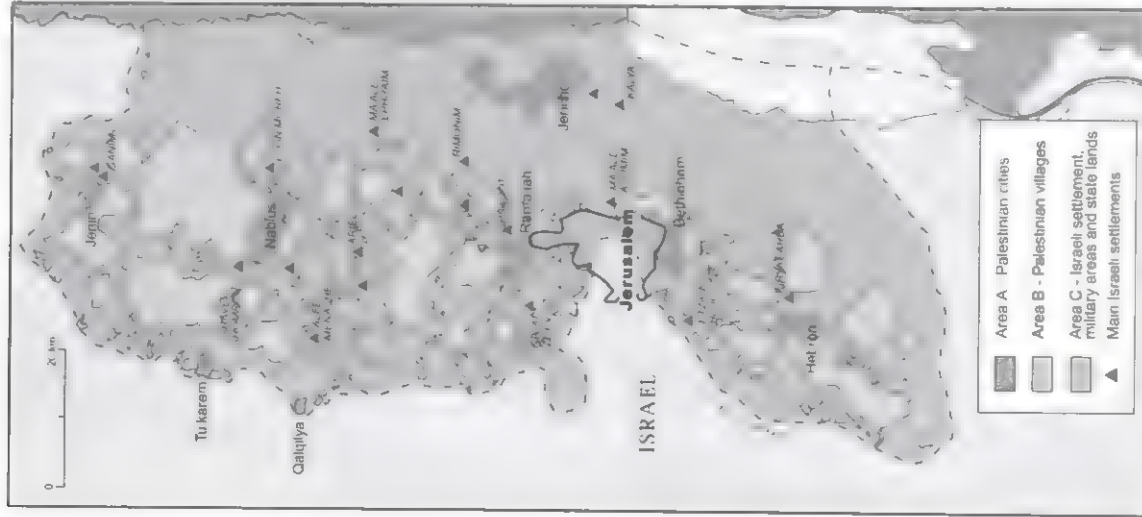
The Oslo process began under a Labor government. In May 1996, the right-wing Likud Bloc won the new Israeli elections, defeating the assassinated Rabin's successor Shimon Peres, and bringing to power Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister. Netanyahu had campaigned against the Oslo accords, and when elected he reneged on almost all of the Israeli troop redeployments his predecessor had agreed on. He continued the construction of settlements and bypass roads in the occupied territories that the Labor Party had encouraged, and consolidated the most nationalistic settlers as a core component of his constituency.

When the Labor Party returned to power in 1999, another hard-line general, Ehud Barak, became prime minister. He escalated the pace of settlement building even beyond that of Netanyahu, resisted troop redeployments, increased closures of Palestinian territory and house demolitions, and raised the government subsidies to settlements in the occupied territories.

For Palestinians, things went from bad to worse, and diplomatic exchanges between the two sides still trying to implement Oslo's "interim" issues, deteriorated.

So at the end of his presidency, having invested a huge amount of personal prestige in figuring out a solution to the conflict, Bill Clinton sum-

## Oslo II, 1995



part of the Palestinian population living under occupation. Recognition of the PLO reversed a longstanding Israeli policy which rejected the PLO because the organization represents the Palestinians as a separate people, inside and outside the occupied territories. Second, it called for redeployment of Israeli troops out of the Palestinian cities and population centers. It was not an end to military occupation, or even a withdrawal of troops (the troops would remain throughout the occupied territories, on the roads, surrounding towns and villages, etc.). But it represented a major improvement in the lives of ordinary Palestinians who could now go to work or send their children to school without worrying about Israeli soldiers camped on their roof or in the road in front of their house. Neither the letters nor the DOP, however, included Israeli recognition of the Palestinian right to an independent state.

For the Israelis, the DOP brought official recognition by the Palestinians of Israel's right to exist, a renunciation of terrorism and armed struggle. It opened the door to an end to the Arab boycott and the beginning of normalization of Israel's relations with Arab neighbors. That meant the opening of trade relations with surrounding countries, a potentially huge boon for Israel's high-tech advanced economy. It also reflected Palestinian acceptance of responsibility for the economic and social needs of the Palestinian population and for security for Israelis—all without ending Israeli control over the occupied territories.

## What was the Oslo process? How did the Oslo process start?

The Oslo process began while the official, public negotiations that followed the 1991 Madrid peace conference were still going on. But after ten

those who survived it, were rejected by their first-choice countries of refuge, the U.S. and Britain, and instead turned to British-ruled Palestine. Significant loss of land and political power for the indigenous Arab population was the result. Arabs, both Palestinians and others, resented being forced to pay the price for European anti-Semitism and the Holocaust in which they had played no role.

At the same time, the pre-state Zionist organizations and later Israeli government leaders viewed themselves as squarely part of the western, Euro-American part of the world. Despite being located in the heart of the Arab Middle East, Israel positioned itself as a civilized, western outpost—explicitly so in early pleas of support directed at British colonial leaders such as Cecil Rhodes—in a foreign, uncivilized part of the world. From the beginning Israeli officials oriented their economic, political and cultural policies towards Europe and the U.S., rather than making efforts to cultivate ties with their neighbors.

Later, when Israel occupied the last 22 percent of historic Palestine after the 1967 war, as well as occupying Syria's Golan Heights, Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, and still later a wide swathe of south Lebanon, Arab anger increased still further. The view of Israel for an entire new Arab generation—Palestinians growing up under occupation, Syrians dismayed at their government's inability to reclaim its lost territory, and more—was shaped by the harsh reality of occupation. And Arab anger towards, and rejection of, Israel increased. In 1968, following the 1967 War, the Arab League voted to reject diplomatic or economic ties with Israel. Even earlier Arab countries had put in place an economic boycott that prohibited trade with Israel. Egypt broke ranks with the rest of the Arab world in normalizing relations with Israel after the Camp David Accords of 1979, and faced years of ostracism within the Arab League. The Arab boycott faded with the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, and Jordan and Israel agreed to full diplomatic and economic relations in 1994. Other countries, including Oman and Morocco, established various levels of trade and economic ties with Israel.

In the United Nations, certain privileges and positions, including rotating membership in the Security Council, are determined within the regional groups of the General Assembly. Composition of the groups, determined at the height of the Cold War, are partly geographic and partly political (i.e., Eastern Europe and Western Europe are in different regional groups). In a move to protest its occupation and policies towards Palestinians, Israel was excluded from participation in the Asian Group that includes the surrounding Arab countries. In 2000, Secretary-General Kofi Annan orchestrated a campaign within the UN to have Israel accepted by WEOG, the Western European and Others Group, which includes the United States, Canada and others.

**Since Jordan's population is about 2/3 Palestinian and there are 21 other Arab countries, why do the Palestinians insist on having a new state of their own?**

Palestine's origins, and its identity as a distinct region within the broader Arab world go back thousands of years. Like most of the countries of the Arab world, Palestine's specific identity as a modern nation-state emerged in the



context of colonial rule. In 1922 when British and French diplomats divided up the Arab portion of the defeated Ottoman Empire, Palestine's modern borders, along with those of Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, were drawn. Some became independent, others remained under colonial or later Mandate authority. But in all of these newly-created countries, newly "national" identity emerged within the local populations.

For Palestinians, national identity was first linked to the land itself. It was their land, their grandparents and great-grandparents and on infinitum, had farmed this land, these olive trees. It was very specific. National dialects, customs, cultural norms, etc., all developed in particular forms. The notion of being transferred to another country, just because they speak the same language, even before the beginning of the modern Arab nation-states, was unacceptable. The equivalent would be expecting seventh- or eighth-generation Americans to accept forcible transfer to Australia, or Britain or even Canada, simply because they speak the same language. Perhaps a more exact comparison, taken from U.S. history, was the forced transfer of Native American tribes from one shrinking reservation to another, on the theory that they could live anywhere just as well as in their indigenous territory. The 4,000 deaths resulting from the Cherokees' forced removal from Georgia along the "Trail of Tears" in 1838-39 was only one such example.

In 1982 then Defense Minister Ariel Sharon developed a "Jordan is Palestine" plan designed to legitimate the idea of forcible transfer of Palestinians out of the West Bank and Gaza, perhaps out of Israel itself, into "their" alleged homeland in Jordan. The campaign never took off, and by 1988, at the height of the first intifada, Jordan's King Hussein announced he was severing the formal sponsorship of West Bank institutions to insure that there would be no confusion about the right of Palestinians to their own state in Palestine.

What the Palestinians want in the 21st century is not a "new" state, but recognition of the independence and sovereignty of what is left of their old nation, which was never allowed to become independent.

### **Don't the Arab countries want to destroy Israel and drive the Jews into the sea?**

Unlike in Europe, anti-Semitism was not a longstanding component of popular or elite culture in the Arab world. During the Spanish Inquisition fleeing Jews famously found refuge in the Arab countries, particularly in North Africa.

In the period leading up to the creation of the State of Israel and the 1947-48 war that accompanied it, many Arabs both inside Palestine and in the surrounding Arab countries believed it would be possible to prevent the creation of a Jewish state, a self-proclaimed enclave of Europe and America in the heart of the Arab Middle East. Across the region people opposed the creation of the state, believing it unjust to the indigenous Palestinians, and governments opposed it largely from fear that a powerful, western-backed Israel would represent a serious threat to their countries' own economic, strategic and political interests.

The token Arab armies which entered Palestine in 1948 were soundly defeated by the smaller but far superior Israeli military. They were defeat-

ed Palestinian cities, including children and youths throwing stones at the tanks and armored vehicles, characterized the first weeks' mobilization. But the Israeli response was far more brutal this time around than it had been during the first intifada; the stone-throwing protesters the day after Sharon's provocative visit to the Haram al-Sharif were met with withering fire, killing four and wounding hundreds on the steps and even inside the mosques. The Israeli military immediately began using live fire and tank-fired weapons where once tear-gas and rubber bullets might have been used first, and soon helicopter gunships and U.S.-supplied F-16 fighter bombers became regular parts of the Israeli arsenal in the occupied territories.

By March 2002, Amnesty International reported over 1,000 Palestinians had been killed; more than 200 of them were children.

In response, Palestinians changed their tactics. The mass street demonstrations largely ended, as the lethal Israeli price exacted for marches and stone-throwing rose. Instead, small armed Palestinian factions took over from the public in challenging the Israeli military occupation forces. Since the Oslo process had created the Palestinian Authority, there were now Palestinian police and security forces armed with rifles and kalashnikovs, and they used their arms both to protect Palestinian demonstrators and civilians, and sometimes to directly challenge the checkpoints and Israeli soldiers. One result was that killing on both sides escalated—but the deaths and injuries were disproportionately Palestinian (about four times as many), and initially the Israeli victims were almost all soldiers and settlers inside the occupied territories.

As the intifada settled into a kind of war of attrition, 24-hour shoot-to-kill curfews were imposed on Palestinian cities and villages for long periods, imprisoning people in their homes and bringing to an end the mass public participation in the streets that had characterized the first intifada. The city of nablus, with a population of over 100,000 has been under curfew for more than 90 days continuously as of mid-September 2002.

### **This whole thing happened after the famous handshake on the White House lawn. Wasn't that supposed to end the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians?**

The famous handshake between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat, under the benign urging of President Bill Clinton, accompanied the signing of the first part of what became known as the Oslo accords. That first agreement, the Declaration of Principles (DOP), outlined a new relationship between the two sides, following more than a year of secret negotiations held in and under the auspices of the Norwegian capital.

The agreement signed 13 September 1993 between the PLO and Israel did not bring an independent Palestinian state into being; it did not call for an end to Israeli occupation or even use the word occupation. But it did transform the terrain on which the diplomatic and political efforts to end the conflict would be waged.

For the Palestinians, the DOP brought about two important goals. First was recognition of the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people—important (despite its current weakness) because it meant Israeli recognition that resolving the Palestinian issue meant more than just the question of that

## PART THREE

# Recent History: The Beginning of the Crisis

### Why did the current crisis begin?

The second uprising, or intifada, began in September 2000. While the immediate spark was General Ariel Sharon's walk on the Muslim holy site, the Haram al-Sharif, in East Jerusalem, the uprising has far more to do with the failed peace process, the dashed hopes and deteriorating lives of Palestinians living under occupation, than with any particular provocation.

### What is this second "intifada"? How is this uprising different from the first intifada of 1987-1993?

The second uprising, that began September 2000, came seven years after the first intifada ended with the signing of the Oslo accords in 1993. Oslo did not bring about the actual goals of the first intifada—the end of occupation and creation of an independent Palestinian state—but it did hold out the hope that the new diplomatic "peace process" would lead inexorably to such a result. So the mass mobilizations, the daily commercial strikes, the tax resistance, the stone-throwing children that characterized the first intifada came to a halt.

After seven years, and especially after the collapse of the Clinton-sponsored Israeli-Palestinian summit at Camp David in August 2000, Palestinians faced the harsh reality that Oslo had been much more about "process" than about peace. Living conditions and the economy had all seriously deteriorated throughout the Oslo years. Israel's military occupation had become increasingly harsh—closures preventing Palestinians from entering Israel were expanded to prevent travel within and between the West Bank and Gaza; military checkpoints proliferated throughout the "swiss cheese-style" maze of Israeli and partial Palestinian authority; house demolitions continued; and settlement construction nearly doubled throughout the occupied territories since Oslo.

The second intifada was the response to those lost hopes and deteriorating lives. Initially it took similar forms to the first intifada—mass protests in the streets against Israeli military checkpoints surrounding

ed again in 1967 when Israel's first strikes destroyed the entire Egyptian and Jordanian air forces before either country could scramble a single plane. Since that time, despite further wars, tensions and continuing occupation, Arab governments have largely come to terms with the existence of Israel in their midst; many are eager to consolidate business and financial links with the far more powerful, far better positioned Israeli economy. If popular opinion were not so strongly against such normalization, there is little doubt that virtually all the Arab governments would be lining up to exchange ambassadors with Tel Aviv.

Since the beginning of the first intifada, or uprising, in 1987, and especially since the collapse of Oslo negotiations and the beginning of the second intifada in 2000, regional anger towards Israel for its treatment of Palestinians living under occupation has skyrocketed. The emergence in the mid-1990s of Arabic-language satellite television stations (most notably Qatar's al-Jazeera along with Abu Dhabi TV) transformed the level of outrage. While most Arabs long knew and opposed Israeli occupation, seeing televised coverage of the day-to-day humiliations, killings, and episodes of extreme violence that are endemic to military occupation brought that opposition to new and angry levels. But still, the dominant opinion in the Arab world focuses on ending Israel's occupation and creating an independent Palestinian state.

### How does Israel see its role in the Middle East region?

The pre-state Zionist leadership consciously crafted an identity for the new State of Israel that was deliberately oriented towards Europe, America and the west. Part of the reason had to do with the tactical effort to win backing from one or another of the colonial powers; to do so, the putative Israelis had to convince their would-be sponsors of their potential value as a surrogate for European, American, Russian or Roman Catholic sponsors. But it also reflected the personal world view of those same leaders; while early Zionist colonies in Palestine were largely agricultural, most Jewish settlers would have been far more at home in Paris, London or New York than in the Middle Eastern hills or desert.

Throughout the Cold War Israel deliberately shaped its position as a junior partner, or surrogate, for U.S. military and strategic reach. Cynical remarks about Israel as the "fifty-first state" reflected the familiarity of the U.S.-Israeli bond. For Washington, while Cold War-driven strategic considerations were the main driving force behind the embrace of Israel, a powerful component was the sense that "Israelis are like us." There was more than a hint of racism in this assessment; it was rooted in distinguishing Israel from its neighbors. However close our ties with Egypt or Saudi Arabia, official Washington thinking went, they're still Arabs, they're not quite "like us." Official and other influential Israeli voices consistently promoted that mythology. The irony, of course, was that two-thirds of Israeli Jews were and are in fact Arabs. But racism and history combined in Israel to insure the continuing domination of Ashkenazi, or white European, Jewish leadership in Israeli government, business and intellectual circles, making it easier for U.S.

officials and business leaders accustomed to dealing with Europeans, not with Arabs.

**What role does Europe play in the conflict? Why doesn't it do more?**

Europe maintains a nuanced position, preserving strong economic and political ties to Israel, while expressing firm opposition to Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and recognition of how those settlements violate the Geneva Conventions, numerous United Nations resolutions and other instruments of international law. The Euro-Israeli Association Accord, for instance, privileges European-Israeli trade by removing tariffs for all goods made in Israel. But the Accord has been the basis of a challenge by the European Union to Israel's practice of labeling goods produced in Israeli settlements in the occupied territories as "made in Israel" and including them as tariff-free in violation of the Accord's provisions.

While Europe was invited to the 1991 Madrid peace talks, it was functionally excluded; the U.S. alone set the terms, developed the agenda and recruited the participants. During the Oslo process, the European Union was called on to pay much of the cost, but remains excluded from serious involvement in the actual diplomacy. European governments throughout the Clinton era appeared to acquiesce to U.S. domination over Middle East diplomacy. Despite his claimed commitment to "assertive multilateralism" as the bulwark of his foreign policy, Clinton never relinquished even partial control of the Israel-Palestine peace process to the Europeans—and Europe never pushed very hard for a seat at the table. In the mid-1990s the European Commission drafted a long critique of U.S. policy towards the Israel-Palestine conflict, and especially of Europe's exclusion from the process. But the report concluded with the statement that nothing in it should be taken as a "challenge to U.S. leadership" on the issue, thus largely vitiating the critique's impact.

When George Bush was elected, European diplomats were wary of the seeming disinterest of this oil industry-oriented administration in the explosive region. By summer 2001, the EU was already moving in where Washington feared to tread. European diplomats helped negotiate an end to Israel's two-day tank-led occupation of the Palestinian town of Beit Jala in August. The EU's security chief, Javier Solana, shuttled between Israeli and Palestinian officials, attempting to broker a new cease-fire. Then, when a new crisis erupted involving Israel's shutting down the Orient House, long the Palestinians' diplomatic center in East Jerusalem, Europe, in particular Germany, moved in. Even the White House acknowledged that the Israeli action represented an "escalation" of the occupation. German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer happened to be in the region at the time, and quickly moved to the center of the diplomatic effort to reopen the Palestinian offices.

After urging that Israel reopen Orient House, Fischer invited the parties to meet in Berlin to open a new dialogue. But he undermined his own position with a careful bow to what he called "the American prerogative"

in Middle East diplomacy. His initiative might have borne fruit; but just a few days later, the terrorist attacks of September 11th occurred, and Europe pulled back.

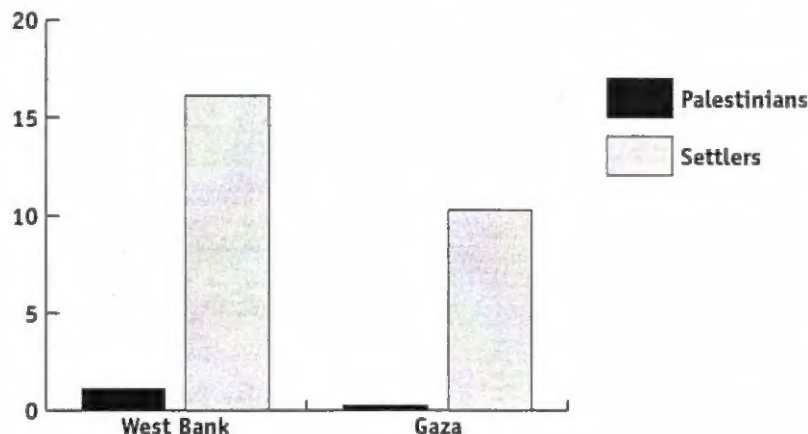
Only months later, when the post-9/11 global diplomatic impasse slowly began to crumble, did Europe begin to revive its cautious efforts. With Israel's violent re-occupation of Palestinian cities in the spring of 2002, most of the European-funded security infrastructure of the Palestinian Authority (police stations, police cars, etc.) were destroyed by Israeli soldiers. Israel made clear its expectation that Europe, not Israel itself, should be expected to cough up the funds to rebuild the shattered infrastructure.

By the autumn of 2002, with the Oslo process collapsed, it remained uncertain whether Europe, perhaps in alliance with other countries or groups of countries, would be prepared to challenge the U.S. "prerogative" and move to initiate a new diplomatic process based on the centrality of the United Nations. In fact, Israel's repeated attempt to close the Orient House and seize the documents and equipment met hardly any external challenge in August 2002.



# FACT SHEET #1: Palestine and the Palestinians

■ Per Capita Land Area Control (m<sup>2</sup>/person)



past 35 years, successive Israeli governments have established over 200 Jewish-only settlements with a population of 383,000 on confiscated Palestinian land, separated from the local population through a series of bypass roads and physical barriers.<sup>10</sup> In the West Bank, Israel has seized 59% of the land and uses 90% of the water.<sup>11</sup> In Gaza, 7,000 settlers, who comprise less than 1% of the population, directly control more than 20% of the land.<sup>12</sup>

## ■ Palestinian Refugees

Palestinians are the largest and oldest refugee population in the world. The U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was established in 1948 as a temporary mechanism to address the needs of Palestinian refugees<sup>13</sup> until they could exercise their right to

return to their homes and receive compensation in accordance with human rights principles and U.N. Resolution 194.<sup>14</sup> UNRWA provides education, health care, relief assistance and social services to the 3.6 million registered refugees, one-third of whom live in 59 refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza Strip.<sup>15</sup> Due to lack of funds, average annual spending per refugee has dropped from about \$200 in 1975 to about \$70 in 1997. In Jordan, refugees are citizens and enjoy a range of economic and social rights. In Syria, refugees are not citizens but have some civil, economic, and social rights. Lebanon bars Palestinian refugees from working in over 70 job classifications, and politicians across the spectrum are against including Palestinians in Lebanese political life.

## ■ Palestinians in Israel

The Palestinians (and their descendants) who remained in Israel now comprise 20% of the population, about 1.2 million people.<sup>16</sup> Although granted citizenship when the Israeli state was established, they lived under direct martial law from 1949 until 1966. Israel currently retains 20 laws that discriminate against the Palestinian national minority in basic aspects of civic life, including laws of citizenship, emigration, education, and land ownership.<sup>17</sup> As a result of such systemic, institutionalized discrimination, Arab communities have the least access to state resources and suffer by far the lowest living standards in all socio-economic categories.<sup>18</sup> During street demonstrations in early October 2000, Israeli police used live ammunition, rubber-coated steel bullets and tear gas against the unarmed protestors; hundreds were injured and 13 Palestinian citizens of Israel were killed.



CESR Fact Sheets on Palestine are produced as a contribution to the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation. The US Campaign promotes the application of international law to the conflict, contributing to a just peace and human rights for all – Palestinians and Israelis. If you would like more information on the US Campaign, go to [www.endtheoccupation.org](http://www.endtheoccupation.org) or contact [us\\_campaign@endtheoccupation.org](mailto:us_campaign@endtheoccupation.org)

The Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) was established in 1993 to promote social justice through human rights - [www.cesr.org](http://www.cesr.org)

10 The Washington-based Foundation for Middle East Peace, *Report on Israeli Settlement in the Occupied Territories: A Guide*, March 2002. Go to <http://www.fmeo.org/reports/2002/102003.html> article entitled *Smoking Facts: Israel's Settlement Vision*

11 World Bank statistics quoted in <http://mondedinfo.com/focus/mideast/territories-eco-en>

12 Ibid.

13 UNRWA defines a refugee as a person whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, and who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1948, including the descendants of persons who became refugees in 1948. See <http://www.un.org/unrwa/refugees/index.html>

14 U.N. General Assembly Resolution 194 provides for the return of the refugees to their homes in what became Israel or to compensation. Israel has formally accepted both Resolutions 181 and 194 (see the preamble of the resolution admitting Israel to U.N. membership).

15 <http://www.refugees.org/world/country/mideast/lebanon.htm> & <http://www.afsc.org/israel/refugees.pdf>

16 From: <http://www.cbs.gov.il/shaton52/shaton52.htm#2>

17 <http://www.adalah.org/background.html>

18 See [http://www.mrip.org/mar/mar223/223\\_yifrachel.html](http://www.mrip.org/mar/mar223/223_yifrachel.html) for information about recent legislation that exacerbates racial discrimination.



# FACT SHEET #1: Palestine and the Palestinians

## WHAT IS PALESTINE?

The area known to the Greeks as Philistia and the Romans as Palaestina became Arab after the spread of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. From that time and until 1948, the majority of the population was predominantly Muslim. Christian and Jewish communities also maintained a continuous presence in the area since these religions were established. The modern borders of Palestine were drawn by the British, whose forces occupied this part of the Ottoman Empire in 1917-18. The stage for conflict was set when Britain declared that it viewed "with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people"<sup>1</sup>, ignoring the legitimate national rights of the Arab people and its own promise to the Arabs to support their independence from Ottoman rule.<sup>2</sup>

British mandate rule opened the door to large-scale Jewish migration from Europe. Unlike existing Jewish communities in Palestine, the new immigrants were Zionists, meaning they believed in establishing a Jewish

state as the solution to European anti-Semitism. In 1947, the United Nations proposed the partition of Palestine into an Arab state on 43% of the land and a



Source: United Nations Department of Public Information, Cartographic Section, June 1997.

Jewish state on 56%, with Jerusalem given international status and open borders.<sup>3</sup> Arabs, who comprised two thirds of the population and owned 93% of the land, rejected the UN Partition Plan as unjust.

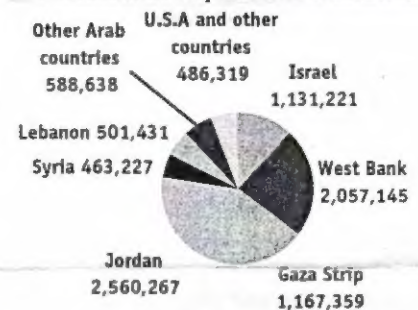
In the 1948 War, Jewish forces conquered additional territory and established the state of Israel on 78% of mandate Palestine. Some 750,000 Palestinians fled or were driven from their homes.<sup>4</sup> Israel was established; Palestine was not. Egypt took over Gaza and Jordan annexed the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. In the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Israel conquered the rest of Palestine and has since ruled Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, through military occupation.<sup>5</sup>

## WHO ARE THE PALESTINIANS?

Today there are close to 9 million Palestinians in three major population groups:

- ◆ 3.2 million live under Israeli occupation in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem;
- ◆ 4.6 million live in exile, with 2.2 million in refugee camps; and
- ◆ 1.1 million are citizens of Israel.<sup>6</sup>

## ■ Palestinian Population Worldwide



Estimated Palestinian Population in the World by Place of Residence - End Year 2000. Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics <http://www.pcbs.org/inside/selects.htm>

## ■ Palestinians Under Occupation

The West Bank and Gaza total only 1,000 sq km (smaller than Delaware).<sup>7</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 242 of 1967 – the legal basis for the Oslo Agreements<sup>8</sup> – calls for Israel's withdrawal from occupied territories based on the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war. It is also against international law for an occupying power to transfer its own population into occupied territory.<sup>9</sup> Yet in the →

### Palestine 1914

Pop. 689,272  
Arabs 629,272 - 92%  
Jews 60,000 - 8%

### Palestine 1946

Pop. 1,912,112  
Arabs 1,303,887 - 68%  
Jews 608,225 - 32%

Source: The Anglo-Palestine Yearbook 1947-8 (London: Anglo-Palestine Publications, 1948), p.33

1 Letter from British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour to Baron Lionel Walter de Rothschild – known as the Balfour Declaration – 2 November 1917. This referred to the indigenous majority population of Palestine as "non-Jewish" and did not recognize its political or national rights. It stated: "It being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine".  
2 Sir Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner in Egypt, confirmed "Great Britain is prepared to recognize and support the independence of the Arabs in all the regions within the limits demanded by the Sherif of Mecca" – second note from Sir Henry McMahon to Sharif Hussein of the Hijaz, October 1915. British Government, "Correspondence between Sir Henry McMahon and

Sherif Hussein of Mecca," October 24, 1915, Parliamentary Papers – Cmd. 5957 (1939)

3 U.N. General Assembly Resolution 181 of 29 November 1947, which designated Jerusalem and Bethlehem as an international zone.

4 See Benny Morris, *The birth of the Palestinian refugee problem, 1947 – 1949*, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

5 For more on the history of Palestine, see the forthcoming CESR Fact Sheet on Palestine No. 3: *Palestine & Israel: Past, Present, Future*

6 From Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics <http://www.pcbs.org/inside/selects.htm> See also the Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook* <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>

7 If UN Resolution 181 were to be implemented, the Palestinian state would

have been established on 43% of mandate Palestine. As it is, the West Bank and Gaza, seen by all U.N. member states, including the U.S., as the site of the future Palestinian state, occupy just 22% of the land of mandate Palestine.

8 The First Oslo Accord was signed by the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. In September 1993. By 1999, a dozen more accords had been signed.

9 Fourth Geneva Convention. Israel is a signatory.